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MEN WE MEET IN THE FIELD.

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By A. G. BAGOT ("Bagatelle").

1881.
TINSLEY BROTHERS, 8, CATHERINE STREET, STRAND,
LONDON.

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MEN WE MEET IN THE FIELD

OR

THE BULLSHIRE HOUNDS.

By A. G. BAGOT ("Bagatelle"),

AUTHOR OF "SPORTING SKETCHES IN THREE CONTINENTS."

London:

TINSLEY BROTHERS, 8, CATHERINE STREET, STRAND.

1881.

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CHARLES DICKENS AND EVANS,
CRYSTAL PALACE PRESS.

PREFACE.

The present series of Sketches in the Hunting Field have, from time to time, appeared in the columns of *The Country Gentleman and Sporting Gazette*, to the Editor of which journal I am indebted for leave to reprint them. All, or nearly all, the characters I have endeavoured to portray have come under my personal observation, and are from life; but I have done my utmost to avoid depicting peculiarities that might serve to identify my models, or using personalities that might offend them.

In placing Men we Meet in the Field before the public, beyond acknowledging that I have perhaps not done full justice to the subject, I offer no apology; for anything said or done, painted or written, that serves in any way to call attention to our glorious old national sport, or to recall perchance the scenes of our youth, is not done amiss. In that it is one more stone, however humble, in the wall of defence which, alas! it is now becoming necessary to build against the attacks of those whose aim seems to be the demolition of all sport, dazzled as they are by the glamour of notoriety, won by sensational legislation, at the expense of all that has made England what she is, and her sons and daughters what they are.

I do not for a moment wish to enter into political argument. In the Field, Liberal and Conservative, Radical and Home-Ruler, meet as one, save only in the struggle for the lead. But what I do hold is that, by measures such as the Ground Game Bill and the Abolition of all Freedom of Contract, our national sports are fast being blotted out, and that it behoves all true sportsmen to array themselves against such things.

Of the matter contained in the volume I am now sending on its way, others must judge. I confess that I have enjoyed the writing of it. If I am fortunate enough to find some at least who enjoy the reading I shall be content, and shall feel I have not laboured in vain.

To those who so kindly received my maiden venture, "Sporting Sketches" (Messrs. Swan, Sonnenschein, and Allen), I offer my best thanks. Like a young hound who has not felt too much whipcord, encouragement has given confidence. I can only hope I may not have flashed over the line.

THE AUTHOR.

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MEN WE MEET IN THE FIELD.

ERRATUM.

For "Hollo!" *read throughout* "Holloa!"

various circumstances and in various positions, there is, perhaps, no medium affording so good an opportunity, or so vast a scope, as the hunting-field.

There more than in any other place do men's characters appear in their true lights. At the covert-side the irritable man, however well he may on ordinary occasions be able to conceal his irritability, will fret and fume if things do not go exactly as he wishes. The boaster, who in the safety of his armchair astonishes his friends with anecdotes of his

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MEN WE MEET IN THE FIELD.

INTRODUCTORY.

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own daring exploits, is, after a fast forty minutes, more often than not weighed in the balance and found wanting. The garrulous individual, who invariably knows where the fox has gone and what the huntsman ought to do, is in the field estimated at his proper value. There also the grumblers never fail to find a grievance, nor the elder generations of sportsmen to lament the "good old days gone by." In fact, the "bell-mouthed pack and tuneful horn" seem to act in some occult way in bringing out the idiosyncrasies of all their followers. This being so, a few sketches may not be uninteresting, and I shall endeavour to draw with my pen some portraits of those with whom we yearly ride, and who are so well known to most of us. To do this the more concisely, I propose to describe the field, subscribers, visitors, and others, who are to be found at the meets from the 1st of November to the end of April, and who go to make up the members of that justly celebrated pack—the Bullshire Hounds. Before individualising,

however, it will be necessary to give a short history of the hunt, with a brief outline of the country, and its gradual growth.

The Bullshire country is one of the oldest in England, and was originally hunted on what is known as the "Trencher system," that is everybody, in lieu of paying a subscription, kept (according to his means) one or more hounds, which he was bound to bring with him to the spot selected by the Master (who was yearly elected as huntsman) for the meet. No sinecure was the office of M.F.H., carrying the horn, for as every hound recognised the rule of a different Master, and every Master considered himself entitled to an opinion in the case of his own hound, there was a good deal of jealousy among the latter and no small amount of "tail" among the former. The "tailing," however, was augmented by the different system of preparation and feeding the Bullshire Hounds received, for while Bellman before hunting was treated to no supper, Truelove had to deal with a sumptuous

repast placed before her by the compassionate but ignorant goodwife, "who couldn't abear the idea of the old dog doing all that work on an empty stomach."

After a little the system proved unsatisfactory, and a step in the proper direction was taken. Old Gregory the Whip was sent round early in the morning the day before the meet to collect the pack, and it thus became his business to see that all fared alike —wisely, and not too well. From this it was an easy stage to kennels, and somehow, before the inhabitants knew how it happened, they found themselves paying their subscriptions with and without a murmur, and were able to point with pride to the Bullshire kennels. Once this an accomplished fact, everything went on smoothly; and from old Gregory and a Master whose office was the subject of an annual election, they now turn out a huntsman, two whips, and a second horseman, and, for a provincial pack, stand first on the list.

Their present Master is one of the right sort, who takes an interest in his hounds and his servants, perhaps at times a little free with his tongue, but only when absolutely necessary, and it is because of their large and varied field that I have selected the Bullshire for description. The country, though not a flying one, has a fair share of grass, and is acknowledged by all to hold a good scent. As there is every conceivable sort of obstacle, of every conceivable size, shape, and form, wet and dry, it requires a clever horse to get over it. Indeed, when some of the swells from the Shires condescend to patronise the Bullshire (no uncommon occurrence, by-the-way), there are generally two or three to be found, like water, at the bottom of a ditch.

I remember hearing a description of his day by a Meltonian, when he returned to his quarters with a battered head-piece and covered in mud. In reply to a question of "Where had he been?" he said: "Lord knows where

I have not been. To the bottom of about ten ditches, three brooks, nearly into a gravel-pit, hung up in a bullfinch for five minutes, and almost broke my neck at the biggest post and rails I ever saw." "Well," continued his interlocutor, "did you have a good run?" "Run!" said he; "I believe you! Ran three miles after my horse and then nicked in, and was up at the finish. Blessed if ever I saw such a country. They think nothing of an hour and ten minutes, and they do stick to it, I can tell you; fox hasn't a chance with the Bullshire. It's for all the world like a stoat and a hare. Rare place to send creditor to; give him a mount on a green nag, he's bound to kill himself."

Added to these advantages, so ably set forth by the Leicestershire sportsman, foxes are plentiful, and, with one notable exception, of whom more anon, everybody looks after them, and does his best to demonstrate the fact that the fox and the pheasant can both be

preserved, despite what Velveteens and his myrmidons may say. The man who rules the destinies of this sporting pack will form the subject of my first sketch.

THE MASTER.

"MORNING, gentlemen," accompanied by a bow to the ladies, apprises us of the fact that Sir John Lappington has arrived, and as we turn round in our saddles we see a cheery face beaming with health and good-nature, and note what a thorough business look both man and horse present. The horse is one of those rare specimens of weight-carriers, known as "a good thing in a small parcel." Standing about fifteen hands two inches, with quarters fit to jump over a house, and shoulders of equal value when landing the other side, clean flat legs with plenty of bone, and excellent feet, well ribbed up,

with a broad deep chest, it stands a living picture of the old-fashioned hunter that could and would go anywhere. And surely the man is not far behind in appearance. Riding about thirteen stone, or a little lighter, with somewhat a careless seat, one's first impression is that he is by no means smartly turned out, though the eye acknowledges at once the workman.

A second and more careful study shows us that, while there is an entire absence of gilt and gingerbread, of varnish and veneer, still, from the crown of his well-brushed hat to the sole of his well-cleaned boot, everything is neatness itself. It may be that we take exception to the brown cords which Sir John always wears; but when one has tried to follow the clever cobby horse and his master through some of the roughest places in the day's work, and our leathers show plainly where we have been, we are fain to confess the wisdom of the said brown cords. Notwithstanding the cheery goodnature that

beams from the Master's face, there is something in his eye and chin that warns instinctively against riding over the hounds or heading a fox, and shows a latent power of anathema and rebuke which, when once heard, is not in a hurry forgotten.

Sir John Lappington has been Master of the Bullshire for four seasons. He took the hounds at the request of the county on the death of Mr. Billington, who had hunted them for six-and-twenty years without hardly missing a day. Some few people urged that the new Master would not be found old enough to control so large a field, being but thirty years of age when he commenced his reign; but the first day dispelled their doubts, for on some of the "galloping-and-jumping" contingent trying to have things their own way, and paying no heed to repeated remonstrances to "give hounds a chance," the young Master astonished everyone by saying to the huntsman: "Stop 'em, Tom;" and when that was effected, turning to the offenders: "Now,

gentlemen, when you have done your d——d steeplechasing we will go on hunting. If you want to break your necks you may put down my name for five pounds to bury the first who does so, provided you run it off at once, so that other people who prefer hunting to rough-riding may not be kept waiting."

This effectually stopped them, and from that day very little trouble has been shown, and when any have offended, it has generally required but one talking-to to bring them to a sense of what was required of them. Such is the man who now rides up punctual to the minute, and is greeted by all with a hearty welcome. The hunt servants, with old Tom the huntsman at their head, are as proud of being under him as they can be, and the hounds simply adore him. See how they fly, heedless of Harry's "Ware 'oss, ger away baik," clustering all round the cobby hunter, and leaving the marks of their affection on boot and saddle. "Eu leu, Minstrel, old boy; ay, Harbinger, good old man," says Sir John, a

word for each by name; and back they go to the rule of Tom, who cannot for the life of him help feeling a twinge of jealousy, that "the hounds should be so 'nation fond of t' young Master, most as much as they are o' me, I'll be blessed if they ain't."

Five minutes of friendly chaff with the carriages, two more with old Farmer Simms, who, on being shown his wife's poultry bill, says: "Give it here, Sir John, give it here. The ould woman would take the money out of a man's breeches if he did not keep his hands in his pockets," and with a laugh Tom gets the signal to move off, Sir John stopping before he canters on to the hounds to say: "Never mind, Simms, I daresay we shall make it all right. The missus and I are old friends," and replying to Simms's loudly-expressed opinion that "The ould wench 'ull fleece you, I fear," with a deprecatory wave of the hand as he ranges up alongside the old huntsman.

The first draw is a gorse lying on the

side of a hill, where there is always a little difficulty in restraining the impatience of the field, who, anxious for a start, are rather apt to override the hounds. There is a hunting-gate, beyond which no one is allowed to go until the hounds are well away, and here the Master posts himself, saying in a loud voice that can be heard by all: "If there is any stranger in the field to-day, he must understand that while hounds are drawing no one is allowed farther than this." At this moment his quick eye catches sight of a youngster who has jumped the rails lower down, and hopes he has escaped detection. "Come back, you sir," rings out; "come back; and as you are so fond of timber you can take the rails up hill. Dash your impudence, when I have just said no one is allowed to go for'ard! Come, at them—no funking;" and as, amid roars of laughter, the culprit, looking exceedingly foolish, rides at the rails, and gets a rattling fall, Sir John chuckles to himself: "Don't think he'll try

that game on again." The hounds are by this time hard at work, and from the way they throw themselves out of the gorse there are evident signs of a speedy find. With keen enjoyment the Master watches the young entry, and as first one and then another of his favourites momentarily expose themselves to view, he thinks he would not exchange his empire for untold wealth.

In this enviable frame of mind he is interrupted by the appearance of a tall cadaverous-looking individual on foot, who, addressing himself to him, says: "Sir John Lappington, I believe?" "That's me; what can I do for you?" is the reply. "Ah! they told me I should find you here, ah! I — my name is Simpkins, Mr. Simpkins, Secretary of the Young Men's Improvement Society. I have been requested to ask for your patronage and subscription for a new school our society have decided on opening for young men in Lappington; and as they told me you were following the chase, ah!

and my time is limited, I thought I should not be intruding if I could persuade you to" (pulling out a long subscription-list) "look over this."

Here, luckily, "Away, g-o-rne a-wa-a-y!" cut short the conversation, and the Master, swinging down the hill and slipping over the bank and ditch at the bottom, almost before the astonished Simpkins has made out what has happened, might have been heard muttering to himself: "Well, I am blowed! Did anyone hear of a man being asked to subscribe to a school when hounds had just found? Following the chase too! If they don't teach the young men better than that, the future Lappingtonians won't be much in the sporting line. Hark for'ard; for'ard away!" and sending his horse somewhat viciously at a bigger pace than usual he is shut out from sight, where for the time I will leave him.

THE HUNTSMAN.

"HOUNDS, please, gentlemen; hounds, please," says old Tom Wilding, as he threads his way through the field, who have, in their eagerness, ridden over the line. "Now, where the deuce should t' fox a gotten to, I wonder?" thinks he to himself; "Harbinger made it good across the lane, I swear, for I saw 'im, and there's naught to turn 'im that I can see." But there is; for an old woman, innocent of mischief, suddenly raises her much-be-bonneted head out of the turnips right in front, and with a "Dang her ugly mug," Tom makes a swinging cast for'ard. Minstrel, hitting off the scent under the gate

out of the field, is promptly corroborated in his statement by Gaylad, and in a second things are going as jolly as a peal of bells.

The old Huntsman stops just a moment before pulling his horse together at the timber, to give "t' ould wench" a bit of his mind. "Look here," says he, "you've frightened fox away with that danged ould top-knot o' your'n. I be a good mind to——" But the old lady drops a most humble curtsy, and looks so penitent, that his anger vanishes, a smile steals over his face, and with a "Coom up," he pops over the rails and gets to his hounds. A bit of a martinet is Tom, and right well does he know how to keep his whips in order. Ay, and for the matter of that, some of the fire-eaters of the field besides.

Woe betide the unfortunate Harry who, keen as mustard, slips away, leaving two couple and a half behind. "All here?" says Tom. "A couple coming up, sir," replies Harry (he thinks it better to economise the truth as to numbers); "they are close

behind." "Then what the devil business have you in front of them? Get back and bring 'em along at once. D'ye suppose my second whip's come out as a horniment?" (Tom, when excited, is a little shaky with his h's.) "If you don't know your business I can jolly soon get someone who does. There's lots of chaps to do the riding without you a-figuring about here. Get back at once, and let me catch you a-leaving hounds behind again." Yet in his heart he thinks none the worse of the lad for being keen to get along in front, and remembers how often he himself has been rated in bygone days for the same offence.

Of course Tom has his aversions, and there is one particular individual who, he says, he "just can't abear"— a Captain Stockley, one of the galloping-and-jumping division, who, although he can ride anything and over anything, knows little of hunting as hunting *per se*, and is always getting on top of the pack. One day, when he had managed to

head the fox twice, the first whip, Charles, allowed his feelings to get the better of him, and holloed: "Hold hard, sir; d——n it, give 'em a chance;" whereupon Stockley rode up to Tom, and with a bland smile said: "I am sorry to be obliged to make a complaint, but one of the whips has been very impudent—in fact, he cursed me." The reply was not quite what the Captain expected, for Tom, seeing the cause of the two mischances in front of him, growled out: "He cursed yer, did he? Well, if it 'ad a-been me, I'd a gi'en yer a jolly good hiding;" and then catching his horse by the head he drove him at the wood fence, and was cheering on the pack before the Captain had recovered from his surprise.

However, we left him just out of the turnips, with the hounds settling down to the line. Everything goes well for some ten minutes, there is a burning scent, lots of fencing for those who like it, and a convenient lane for those who don't. All of a sudden the hounds throw their heads up and spread like a

fan. Not a sign does the Huntsman make beyond holding up his hand to stop the rush of the field. But with one eye on the pack, and the other looking forward to where the sheep are scampering across the meadow on the hillside and huddling together in a close column, he sits like a statue. Deaf is he to the remonstrances of the eager ones, who say: "It's for'ard, Tom; get along," merely remarking: "Let 'em puzzle it out; they want to hunt now. Yer can always lift 'em, but yer can't always get their heads down again;" and in a few moments he is rewarded by seeing the hounds work it out of their own accord, and dash forward, proud of their own cleverness.

Some of the strangers to the Bullshire country say Tom is slow, but they do not know the old man. See him in another half hour, when the fox is begining to run short. They are beginning to look for their second horses, and someone remarks that Charles is away. Suddenly a cap is seen in the air some

four fields to the right, and "Hoick, hollo, hoick, hollo!" rings out clear. "Who is that?" ask some of the field. "Why, it's Charles! how the deuce did he get there?" say others. The Huntsman, however, knows well how it all came about, for did not he send Charles off to the high ground overlooking Bromley Wood on the off chance of a view? and now he does not wait an instant to discuss the question, but with a "chink-wink" of the horn and with cap in hand he gallops off, lifting the pack almost on to the fox's back.

Two fields farther on his "Who-whoop" tells everybody that all is over, and as they ride up one after another they see the old man, with his gray hairs streaming in the breeze, standing in the middle of his hounds, holding aloft the fox at arm's length, preparatory to giving his body over to the tender mercies of Traveller, Gaylad, and Co. "Eugh, tear 'im and eat 'im," and the "worry, worry" begins. Tom looks up at his young master with a smile, and says: "We've got the ould divil

this time, sir; he's beat us often enough before;" and then raising his voice so as to be heard by all, he continues: "None so slow either. If we had'na let t' hounds work it out theirselves, fox would a-been a-going now. "Where to, sir?" as he swings into his saddle. "Bromley Wood? right, sir. Coom away, hounds; coop, coop, coom away;" and Tom trots off with the pack best pace, for, as he remarks: "It's lunch-time now, and if so be I bestirs mysen I can leave about half t' field behind; and that's just what I like. I can get away comfortable without a lot a-trampling and messing over t' hounds, and them as likes eating better nor hunting, why they've no cause to grumble if they're chucked out."

As he approaches the wood, a wave of the hand sends the whole pack tumbling in, the two whips taking their stations like clockwork. With a "'War 'oss!" the old Huntsman jumps into cover, and though lost to sight his voice is heard out of the woods cheering on his hounds. "Eugh, at 'im, my beauties. Eugh,

doit, eugh, boys," he shouts; and the pack, who have learnt to love, ay, and what is more, respect their tutor, fly to his hollo, each doing what our American cousins call their "level best" to please him.

Tom, when he gets home, will not fail over his glass and pipe to recount exactly what each of his favourites did at each particular spot, for nothing escapes his quick eye, and he fully returns with interest the love of the Bullshire Hounds, of which he has been Huntsman for some eighteen years, and in which position he hopes to remain until he is, as he puts it, "run to ground."

Before leaving him, one anecdote will suffice to show the kindliness of the old man's heart towards dumb animals. They had had a long wearing day over a heavy country, with but little or no scent, and Tom found himself on leaving off some eighteen miles from the kennels. On arrival, after seeing that his darlings were all right (a duty he never neglected), he thought it about time to-

look after himself, and had just sat down to his well-earned supper, when a small boy arrived at his house, crying fit to break his heart. "What's up, my lad?" said Tom. "P-p-please, sir," replied the urchin between his sobs, "old Bob's b-b-een runned over, and they is broke 'is leg, bo-hoo! and mother s-says as how he mun be shot—for her canna mend it; and if yer p-please, Bob allas slept along wi' me sin' 'e wur a puppy, a-and I c-can't abear it, bo-hoo!" "Well, boy, don't 'e cry; I'll come down mysen and see tew 'im," said the old Huntsman; and, tired and supperless as he was, he there and then put on his coat and tramped off the best part of a mile to see to the crippled terrier, and after setting the leg and making the poor dog as comfortable as he could, he sat up best part of the night nursing it as a mother would her baby. It was three o'clock in the morning before Tom got into his bed; and he will tell you how tired he was, but he will also say: "Poor old doggie, 'e was just for all the

world like a Christian. There was none on 'em as knowed aught about it, and when I'd done 'is leg he wagged 'is stump of a tail, saying plain enough: 'Don't 'e go now; I'm main thankful to yer, but don't 'e go,' that I couldna a-bear to leave 'im till 'e wur a bit more comfortable like. You see, we can hollo out, but them dum' animals canna." Bob, the old dog, is still alive, and the boy is now an under-keeper, but neither of them forget old Tom's kindness, and both would almost lay down their lives for the Huntsman of the Bullshire Hounds.

THE WHIPS.

"'Say, Harry, the old man killed his fox well to-day," says Charles, the First Whip, to his junior, as they jog home to the kennels in the evening.

"Umph!" replies Harry; "but he need not have dropped it so hot on to me just because them two couple of loiterers stopped back. Blessed if I ever saw such hounds as them for messing about in cover. It's always the same. Caterer and Bellman, Pillager and Marksman, never up in time; and then if I gets on a bit, it's 'Where's them two couple? Go back and fetch 'em at once.' Dashed if I oughtn't to take a return ticket to every field in the county."

Charles, who thinks it by no means improbable that some day he may find himself with the horn of office, and Harry promoted to First Whip's place, merely says: "Well, you shouldn't be in such a thundering hurry to get off. You know your place is back, and back you should be."

At this juncture they ride up to The Bell and Horns, a famous halfway house, where they brew the best of ale, and can, if so disposed, give you a glass of the best whisky out of Ireland. The landlord, a sporting old veteran, bustles out and takes Tom's order for "Three pints of dog's nose" (a compound of ale and gin), "and some gruel for the nags."

"Well, what sort of a day have you had?" says he. "Nay, nay, don't mind the hound, let him be," as Harry is proceeding to correct Minstrel's attack of curiosity concerning the construction of Boniface's waistcoat. "The old boy and I are friends," and he pats the hound's sensible head.

Old Tom, having taken his face out of the

pint pot, and smacking his lips, replies: "A first-rate day. Found in the gorse, run through Bouffler's meadows up to the Mere, turned in the lane, where the fox was headed, then over the Ring Hills, and killed by Bromley Wood. Charles here," pointing to his aide-de-camp, "was the means of our killing; and I must say Harry did uncommon well, though he does always want to be in front."

At this meed of praise from their chief both the Whips feel some inches taller, and Harry quite forgets his rating in the morning.

The horses gruelled and the score paid by the Huntsman, they are again on the road, having been joined by a couple of farmers going their way as far as the cross-roads, and with whom old Tom is soon in close confabulation. Harry rides for some distance without vouchsafing a word, save an occasional "Whip, get for'ard," to some straggler of the pack. At last he says:

"Charles, the old man is a good 'un, and

no mistake. I'd sooner have a kick from him than sixpence from anyone else. He's quite right—business is business; but when it's over how many of 'em would stand a glass, 'specially after a bit of a word?"

"You're right, my lad," replies Charles. "You'll go mony a day afore you pitch on a man like old Tom, or, for the matter o' that, on a pack like our'n. Look you, it ain't every Huntsman as 'ull let his Whips into the secret of breeding; but I'll be bound there ain't a hound as you and I don't know as much about as he does hisself."

"What are you two a-chattering about?" interrupts Tom.

"Only a-saying as how we knowed the pedigrees, sir," said Harry.

"So you ought. I'm sure I lets Charles and you know all I can. My system is 'fair do's.' Every man's got a summut to do with the run, and they're our hounds; and though I say it as perhaps shouldn't, we've the best Master and the best pack in England; and

when I comes on the society, if Charles there ain't ready to take my place, why it will break my heart. Ay, my lad, and then you can get for'ard as much as you like."

"I knows one thing," says Harry, whose heart is getting too big for his waistcoat, "the Bullshire have got the best Huntsman in England, or, for the matter o' that, in the world; and I'm main sorry as I vexed you to-day leaving them hounds in cover."

"Not a bit, lad, not a bit; it's over now. I like to see yer keen; but duty first, yer know," replies Tom. "Charles," he continues, "it looks all like a frost to-night. What do yer think?"

"Freezes now, and there are two or three of these hounds going lame a bit, and they find the ground a bit hardish," says Charles.

By this time they have arrived at the cross-roads, and the two farmers turn off, leaving the Huntsman and his two Whips with a three-mile trot before them.

It may be gathered from the above the

sort of terms that the Bullshire Hunt servants were on with each other, and what good feeling existed between them. Charles, the First Whip, had served his apprenticeship with the pack—first as a lad in the kennel, then as Second Whip, and lastly where we find him. His whole soul lay in his work, and the most miserable time he owns to in his life was when he broke his leg riding over a gate, and was laid up for six weeks away from his darlings. "I shouldn't a minded if it had been in the summer," said he; "but having to lay up abed in the middle of this beautiful scenting weather, it's d——d hard luck, and I know the beauties will be wondering where the deuce I've got to." As soon as he could move, his first outing was to the kennels, where the reception, or rather ovation, he obtained corroborated his opinion anent the hounds missing him.

Equally fond of hunting was Harry, though, it must be confessed, he liked the riding part the best. Originally a farmer's boy, he first made his appearance in the

hunting-field on the top of a leader out of the plough, which he had surreptitiously detached, and the way he rattled the old nag along, chains and all, over or through everything, gained him his place. Sir John Lappington, happening to see him, made inquiries about the boy, and when he was turned off by his indignant master—for of course he was turned off when his escapade came to light—he asked the lad if he would like to go to the kennels. Harry jumped at the offer, and when there he made himself so useful and learnt to ride so quickly that on the Second Whip leaving suddenly, through misplaced confidence in the amount of liquid he could "carry," Harry was put in as a stop-gap, and did so well that he was officially appointed Second Whip, and has been so now for three seasons, giving every satisfaction.

Of his powers of riding the following anecdote will show:

They had been running hard one day last season, and were getting on terms with their

fox, when, just as they approached the Swill (a deep muddy brook, to jump which when low was a thing to talk of, and when full almost an impossibility), a fresh fox jumped up right in the centre of the pack, and took half of them over the stream, which was bank full. To stop them was a necessity, and there was no bridge nearer than half a mile. Harry, without waiting a minute, pulled his nag together, and shouting: "Here's in or over. I canna swim; but I've naught to leave 'cept my togs, and the're master's," rode at it, and, to the astonishment of everybody, in another second was safe across and had stopped the hounds on the far side. How he got over is a mystery to this day, and no one was so astonished as himself. If you ask him he will tell you "he only knew hounds had to be stopped, and if he had gone under he could not have helped it. He trusted to luck and his spurs, and they pulled him through."

It is small wonder that everything works like clockwork when Master, Huntsman, and

Whips all act in concert and harmony, and Charles and Harry know full well the value of their situations. After the horses are done up for the night, and the hounds are seen to, fed, warm and comfortable on their benches, the two will as like as not go up and smoke a pipe at old Tom's cottage before turning in; and the knowledge they gain in those "evenings at home" is untold, for, as Charles said, the old man keeps nothing back, and is never so pleased as when he is giving his Whips the benefit of his long experience. Should the frost set in, the Master will be down at the kennels in the morning for a certainty, and two or three instructive hours will be passed in talk of horse and hounds.

THE SECRETARY.

A MAN of immense importance is Mr. J. Boulter of The Grange, quite as essential to the welfare of the Bullshire Hunt as either Master or servants; and, indeed, if you could see through the double-breasted pink, the corduroy waistcoat, and the gray flannel beneath, into his innermost heart, you would, I am almost convinced, find that Mr. B. was there written down as the man of the lot.

No light task is his, namely that of professional beggar. For he is Secretary and Treasurer to the Hunt, and on him falls the onus of collecting as well as receiving subscriptions. Long practice has made him

an adept in the art of "cornering" a defaulter, for he has been in office for fifteen years, and it is his boast that if a pound is to be got he is the man to get it.

On one occasion he was sorely put about by a man (I was going to say a gentleman, but his conduct precludes the use of the term), who came down from town and established himself in the country, bringing with him a large stud of hunters. Naturally the Secretary fixed his eagle eye on so promising a subject, and after a month or so began to hint at a subscription, which of course was promised but never came.

Well, the season was drawing to a close and no cheque had been received from the stranger, who, by-the-way, had not forgotten to find fault with everything and everybody; moreover Mr. Boulter had heard by a side-wind that half the large stud were gone, and the rest, accompanied by their owner, would shortly follow. This, coupled with the oft-repeated question at the covert-side of

"Hollo, Boulter, got his coin yet?" put our Secretary on his mettle. So one off-day he rode over to the inn and interviewed the individual, asking him point blank for his cheque, as he (Mr. B.) was making up the accounts. The answer was not propitious, for the snob replied: "I have not got my cheque-book with me, but here are two sovereigns, which is quite sufficient for such a provincial pack as yours."

Boulter pocketed the sovereigns and retired, meditating revenge. At last, however, he hit on a plan.

The meet on the following Monday was fixed for Bindley Park, and the first draw was a long wood, at one end of which lay the house of a market-gardener and small farmer. The only way from the Park to the wood was through the farmyard-gate and out into the field, unless you jumped the fence into the market-garden. Mr. Boulter accordingly took the owner of the said gate into his confidence, as well as those of the

field he could trust, and on the day of the meet the gate was found to be locked, and no one knew where the farmer had gone. To lift it off the hinges was impossible, and old Tom, with a twinkle in his eye, said: "Dang it all; but we mun go round," and forthwith made a pretence of trotting off.

"Never heard such a thing in my life," said the non-subscriber, falling into the trap. "Dashed piece of impudence; sort of thing one might expect in this benighted country. I'm dashed if I'm going round; I shall go through the beggar's garden;" and he proceeded to put his threat into execution by riding at the hedge.

As he rose at the fence the farmer's face was seen peeping round the gate, and as the horse descended into the garden a terrific smash was heard, followed by a loud altercation with, "Damage to my glass and pots and that there bed of young stuff," etc. etc. The next morning the owner of the large stud was presented with a bill of costs to the amount

of £20, which, after a deal of blustering, he paid, fifteen sovereigns finding their way into Mr. Boulter's cash-box, the remaining five amply repaying the market-gardener for the loss of two broken and useless lights, a few cabbage-stalks, and a selection of old pots, which he, together with the Secretary, had placed under the hedge at likely spots.

Thus did Mr. Boulter score, and he enjoys nothing so much as telling the story of how he trapped the stranger, though, by-the-way, the same story increases in dramatic incident year by year.

Most amusing it is to watch the reception of the Secretary as he rides up on his famous jumping cob. Those who have paid up greet him with: "Morning, Boulter; you're looking very fit;" and sometimes, when perchance he is arrayed more gorgeously than usual as to his headpiece, "What! a new hat? Dash it all, but that's the second this season; there'll be no money left if you go buying hats like this out of the fund. Here,

Lappington" (to the Master), "here's the Secretary been embezzling again, and broken out into another new topper." While those who have as yet not forwarded their subscription nod him a good-morning, and then somehow their steeds, which up to the present have been behaving in a most rational manner, suddenly get excited, and it requires the undivided attention of their riders to prevent them running away.

In fact, they do run away until they manage to place a convenient distance between themselves and the jumping cob. The Secretary, however, is fully up to all these little dodges, and generally brings down confusion on one or other member by saying with a chuckle: "Dear me, So-and-so, what a funny thing it is, your horse is always fidgety when I come near him. One would think he was afraid of being asked for a subscription, and forgets that his master has paid." After a pause: "By Jove, no! I'm wrong and the horse is right. Your cheque has not come

yet. What a sensible beast the animal is!" He says this is a most infallible remedy, and that the following morning he invariably finds a letter on his table enclosing the required article, and apologising for forgetfulness.

Perhaps the secret of his success lies in his great popularity, for his cheery manners and jovial smile have endeared him to all. Among the farmers' wives he is worshipped, and though they one and all swear that "Next time they are not a-going to be talked over about that poultry-bill," it is always the same. Before the Secretary rides or drives away from the homestead the bill is forgotten, and all the children are crowing after him to tell them one more "'tory."

One good dame in particular is most emphatic on the subject of his powers of persuasion. "You see, my dear, says she, "I sends in a bill for two turkeys, six couple of ducks, just a-fatting too, three couple of hens, and a whole brood of chickens. When I sees Mr. Boulter a-coming up I says to myself says

I, ‘ Now, Mrs. Styles, don't you go for to be bamboozled.' But, laws! afore he's been in the place half an hour I've nearly busted myself a-larfin', and I finds myself a-drinking a dish of tea with him, and as fully persuaded as how it's my place to keep the turkeys for them beastly foxes as I don't know what; and then the blessed bill goes in the fire, and I'm a loser of close on twenty-eight shillings. But then I knowed him as a lad, bless 'im; and there's never a Christmas but what a hamper of game and a bottle of sherry comes to the farm; so there's no bones broke."

With all his wheedling powers, Mr. Boulter is a thorough sportsman. There is not an earth in the country that he does not know as well as his own house; and he is equally well acquainted with the run of every fox. Every hound he knows by name, and can give you chapter and verse for both pedigree and performance.

A sure find for breakfast, dinner, or lunch, too, is The Grange, and for a bottle of real

old '47 port never drawn blank. Unbounded hospitality is the order in that establishment, where throughout the season Mrs. Boulter takes care that something is always on the table "in case the hounds should come that way." Talking of Mrs. Boulter, there is a piece of chaff against her husband that the day he was married he not only got a subscription to the hounds out of the parson, but by exercising his persuasive powers actually got off the fees!

The annual hunt-dinner is a great day for the Secretary. On that occasion he takes the vice-chair, and proposes the health of Sir John, the Master, in a speech which poor Mrs. B. has to listen to off and on for the three previous days. Once the meek little woman did rebel. The speech she had put up with, but when her lord and master returned home at two o'clock, exceedingly jovial, and kept her awake till six o'clock by alternately treating her to "John Peel," and informing her, with a somewhat foolish laugh, that

"they called me besht f'ller in shworld, drunk m'very good shealth, 'pon m'shoul," she thought it was a little too much; and when the orator awoke next day, headachey, chippy, and penitent, she gave him a piece of her mind which so astonished him that he has never exceeded again, and now returns at eleven sharp.

Sometimes during the summer months Boulter is to be seen struggling with a pile of luggage at a foreign railway station, looking as miserable as a man can look, and heavily handicapped as to the language of the country in which his wife has elected to travel. But the trip never lasts long. Some business connected with the hunt invariably calls him back, and on a hot August day you will find him at the kennels chatting with Tom Wilding over the prospects of the coming season or the young entry, and anxiously longing for the "beastly harvest" to be over, and for November leaves to fall.

If not there he will be riding round looking up Velveteens and his satellites, and endeavouring to imbue them with the motto of "Live and let live," as applicable to the fox.

THE FARMER.

"LIKE master like man" is a very old saying, and, like many of those ancient saws, very true. Therefore, in such a sporting country as the Bullshire, with such a sporting Master at the head of affairs, it stands to reason that the field, or at all events the majority of them, should be equally imbued with the love of the chase. Now in every country the mainstay and backbone of the hunt is the Farmer, for without his consent and co-operation fox-hunting would become a thing of the past, and instead of a series of brilliant gallops and a successful season, we should read of a series of actions for trespass and verdicts for damages, carrying costs.

Keen sportsmen and true friends to the hunt are the Farmers of Bullshire, so there is little fear of opposition on their part. Indeed, on one occasion they combined to make it very "warm" for a stranger who came among them, and who did not fall in with their views concerning the necessary amount of support to be given to the hounds. The erring member was a man who, having made some money in the chandler line in London, took it into his head that he was cut out for a Farmer, and accordingly took a farm in the centre of the hunt. From the moment he set his foot in the place he gave offence, for the first thing he did was to wire the whole of his fences, and then gave notice that anyone riding across his land would be summoned for trespass and "prosecuted according to law." "He was not a-going to 'ave them beastly dorgs and 'osses a-running over his land, not if he knowed it." A climax, however, was reached when the surly brute assaulted one of the members of the hunt with a pitchfork, and swore he would lay down

poison for the hounds. A meeting was there and then called to discuss the question, and it was unanimously decided to give the individual "what for."

Accordingly, some of the younger Farmers assembled one evening, and by the following morning there was not a trace of wire to be seen nor a gate-post standing in the holding of the ex-chandler. Strange to say, the local police, into whose hands the matter was immediately put, failed to discover the offenders, and the country-side was straightway ringing with the candleman's discomfiture. The next time he went to market not a beast could he sell, and it was the same with everything. He found a strong league against him, none would buy from him and none would sell to him; so at the end of a year he retired in disgust, much to the delight of the conspirators.

No two better representatives of the Bullshire Farmers, old and young, could be found than Simms and his son. The father—hard-working, hard-riding, hard-headed, with fifty

years of practical knowledge on his shoulders —is a firm believer in Church and State and the rotation of crops. With a horror of anything like steam, and a decided prejudice against the School Board, he stands out a true type of the warm-hearted old-fashioned yeoman.

The son, equally hard-working in his way, and still harder perhaps in his riding, is full of what his sire is pleased to call "danged rattletrap notions," born of the Agricultural College. Steam ploughs or "cultivators" he pins his faith on. Church and State he has not much time, he says, to think about. The rotation of crops must be regulated by manuring, and he drives the old man nearly wild by learned treatises on the subject of superphosphates, nitrates, and guano.

Each in his own way is an excellent Farmer —the one of the old school, practical and working in a groove, the other of the new, mechanical and enterprising. In the hunting-field, however, they meet on common ground, and as there are but few fixtures at which both

father and son do not turn up, it may be taken for granted that in this respect their opinions coincide.

Mark the difference in the respective "get-up" of the two as they jog along together to Highfield cross-roads. Old Simms' long-coat is, from constant exposure, more of a brown than the black it originally was, and his hat has evidently had a few words with the hat-brush (the latter having revenged itself by running "heel"), for the silk is all the wrong way, and there is a large dent in the top. He still adheres to a bird's-eye fogle, wound three times round a high white collar, the corners of which only are visible, and contrast strongly with his jovial red face. High jack-boots, and stout cords that have seen the end of many a hard day, complete his attire, while his horse, a real "good 'un," is, like himself, all in the rough. His son, on the contrary, is as neat as a new pin, in a hunting-cap, double-breasted Melton coat, white breeches and tops; and the horse is on a par with his rider.

"Ah Simms, I knew you would turn up," say a cluster of sportsmen as the pair arrive at the meet.

"Good morning, gentlemen; bound to be at Highfield, if possible. James here" (pointing to his son) "would never forgive me if I did not come and see his gorse drawn, though I do tell him as how, with all the stinking stuff he puts on the land, there ain't a ghost of a chance of any scent," is the reply.

"Never you fear, father," retorts James; "you wait till they find, and if they don't run as well over my land as any other I'll eat my hat."

"All right, my boy," laughs the old man. "I hope you and your young 'un may come across one of those infernal steam ploughs of yours, like I did this morning, all of a sudden. The mare nearly put me down, old stager as she is, and what that cocktail of yours 'll do, Lord knows."

This raises a general laugh against James, in the middle of which the Master rides up.

"Well, James, have you got one for us to-day?" he asks. "Tom tells me that we are sure of a fox in the osiers at the bottom, but if you know of one in the gorse we'll go there first."

"Try the gorse first, Sir John, if you please. I think I can promise one there," replies James Simms, in momentary dread that Tom and the osiers might win the day.

And as Sir John, nodding to the Huntsman, says: "Highfield Gorse, Tom," James's face beams with pleasure, and, together with his father, he trots off to superintend the arrangements. "A chip of the old block" is the general verdict, as James, sending his "young 'un" at a low post and rails, which he hits hard all round, cuts off a corner, and canters on to the bottom end, where he remains as mute as a sphinx, merely telegraphing to Tom and his father that he was there. Just as the hounds are thrown in, a boy runs up to him and, with a grin, says: "Mayster, ay's theer; I'n sayd 'un. Ay's down at bottom end by t' ould stump."

"All right, Jim, my lad; you keep quiet.

If he's there you shall have a bob," replies James, burning with impatience as he hears no sound save Tom's "Eleu, in, eleu 'ave at 'm. Eugh, boys."

"Blank, by the Lord Harry!" he ejaculates, as two or three hounds appear outside; and, turning to the boy, he asks: "My lad, are you sure you saw a fox?"

"I'n sayd 'un; ay's theer," is the reply. "Ay mun bay up stump."

"Here," cries James, "take my whip, and if you can get him out your bob will be two-and-six."

The boy does not wait a moment, but, heedless of furze, dashes on to where the old ivy-covered stump stands, and is soon swarming up to the top. A crack of the whip, a scuffle, a shout from the lad of "Look out, mayster," and a fine old dog jumps out and makes off right under James's nose.

"Good lad," he says, as the boy returns with his whip; "here, catch." And while James utters a view hollo that would wake

the dead, the lad, having spat upon it for luck, transfers half-a-crown to his pocket.

"All right, Tom; down the field and over the fence to the right. Come on, dad;" and Tom, getting his hounds on the line in a twinkling, the trio are hard at it.

"Pull that young 'un together," says old Simms as they neared the fence; "it's a big 'un." His old mare slips over as if it was child's play. Not so the "young 'un." Going like an express train, he never rises an inch, and James finds himself and the nag somewhat mixed up on the other side.

"That's a buster. No damage, eh?" says Tom.

"Not a bit; for'ard on," replies James, swinging himself into his saddle, and giving his astonished animal a gentle reminder. "It'll teach him to rise next time. There goes the governor," as his father landed in a blind ditch at the next obstacle, but was up and going again in a moment.

At this crisis they are joined by the

Master and a chosen few. "Ah, this is something like a fox, worthy of the family," laughs Sir John Lappington as he gallops alongside. "Did you breed him on purpose?"

"No, Sir John; I can't quite say that. He's an artful old dodger though, and mother says she's had the feeding of him. He was up in the stump, and a lad fetched him out with my whip," replies Simms the younger as they stride over the grass.

"By gad, fox is bound for your place," says Tom to the father. And Tom is right. Straight as a die he heads for old Simms' farm, and now that they are on his land the son does not forget to chaff his father most unmercifully about the roughness of the fences. A few fields farther on a labourer hollos him, and in the meadow before the house the hounds view, and they run into him almost in the garden.

"Who-whoop," yells the old man, as pleased as Punch. "Now then, missus," as Mrs. Simms comes out to see the end of the

destroyer of her chickens, "ale and beer and anything you have. What is it, gentlemen? Give it a name," as the field one by one jump off their smoking horses. "We must drink the health of this one; it's, as Sir John says, a family fox. Oh, bother the turkeys, missus," as Mrs. S. mutters something about feeding the fox; "you can think of nothing but turkeys. We's all a-dry here;" and he bustles off to fetch out some more of the rare old home-brewed, reappearing in a few minutes with an enormous jug. "Now, Sir John, one more glass. No? Anybody else say anything? Here, Tom, I must have that brush. Best thing we've had this season. Oh, *you* don't want any more beer, James; you ought to feed on phosphates," as his son holds out a horn to be replenished. "There, bring my horse, lad," to a labourer; and the old man, his face beaming with pleasure, is ready for the fray again.

That evening there is what James calls a "symposium" at the farm, and the run is run over again. "Twenty-five minutes without a

check, and thank you kindly for the missus, self, and son. I only hope we shall be able to find as good a one next time we draw the gorse, and if every one of us has a family fox on his place, the Bullshire need have no fear about sport," is what old Simms says in acknowledging the toast of himself and family, which is drunk with three times three.

THE PARSON.

It is related of the late Bishop of Winchester that, on one occasion when shooting, he was asked by his host to remonstrate with the keeper for his non-attendance at church, and accordingly he did so. "Well, my lord," replied the man, "I owns I doesn't go much to church, but I reads my bible regular, and I can't say as I've found anything there about t' apostles going a-shooting, and they was bishops."

"Quite right, my man, quite right," was the ready answer. "You see they did not preserve much in those days, so they went fishing instead."

Equally ready was the answer of the Rev. William Halston, when his diocesan informed him that so much hunting did not meet with his approval, and on the argument waxing warm had allowed himself to make use of a somewhat unclerical expression. "Sir," said the angry bishop, "you go galloping all over the country, and your parish is going to the dogs."

"Exactly the reason, my lord, why I hunt," replied his reverence with a smile. "When all my parishioners are going to the dogs, it is my positive duty to go also, if only to look after them."

The bishop thought somehow that he had met his match, and so nothing further was said on the subject. That little episode occurred some twenty years ago, when Mr. Halston was a younger man, but his love of hunting has if anything increased with his age, and seldom is his well-known face absent from any of the meets within reasonable distance (which he computes at eighteen

miles); and a bold rider must be the man who, when hounds are running, sets himself down to cut out "t' ould Parson," as the Rector of Copthorpe is called.

Copthorpe, I may mention, in early days was the only church for miles on that side of the country, and the living embraced no less than four straggling parishes, the farthest being some twenty miles distant. With the growth of the population came the necessity for more places of worship, and besides a new church built at Lappington by Sir John's father there is also one at Highfield, situated at the other extremity, the mother church still being, of course, at Copthorpe.

From this it may be wondered how the Rector can find time to do his work and hunt as well. But that he does so is undeniable, for there is not a cottage in the whole parish that some time or other during the week he does not visit, and high and low, rich and poor, one and all love and honour their Parson.

The cottagers simply adore him, for numerous are the tales round the country-side of how "t' ould mon sot up night after night wi' Jack Bliss when ay fell down t' gravel-pit drunk, and welly killed hisself;" and how "ay used to ride o'er every other day wi' some port-wine or summut in his pocket when So-and-so's wife was bad in t' fever-time, six years back." Often does the old gentleman (for he now numbers close on seventy years), coming back after a long day with the hounds, snatch a hasty meal, and, jumping on the back of his famous pony Jerry, canter off some six or seven miles to see a poor parishioner that one of his curates had reported sick; and, should occasion require it, the morning light will find him seated by the bedside of the sufferer, speaking to him or her such words of consolation and hope as make the pain seem less and the heart seem lighter.

His power, too, is unlimited, and on more than one occasion has the arrival of Parson

Halston put a sudden stop to a free fight that looked strangely like ending in bloodshed. For the men know that he will stand no nonsense; and still fresh in the memory of most of the pitmen is the discomfiture of one of their number, Black Joe, who in his drunken fury attacked his pastor, and went down like an ox before a deadly left-hander, delivered with a science born of Alma Mater and "town and gown."

They caught "t' ould Parson" up in their stalwart arms then and there, and how they did cheer him as they carried him down the street!

From that day his rule was established, and a word now is sufficient, without anything else, to stop "riot."

But it is not only those workers in the mines that have their story; the farm-labourers are equally loud in singing his praises, for did not he, when a paid hireling was stumping the country urging them to strike against their masters, jump on the cart from whence the

ranter was hurling forth denunciations against "the landlords' tyranny and the farmers' oppression," and holding him forcibly down with one hand, address them all as they gazed in wonder, and say to them how they had "worked together and drank together, hunted together and suffered together, for many years; and now would they listen—they, the men of Bullshire—to a miserable whimpering Cockney from London, who could neither mow a swath nor pitch a load to save his life?"

And when they were all for ducking the vermin in the mill-pond, did not he drive him off to the town in his own cart, and never lose sight of the agitator till he saw the train safely out of the station with the individual well on his road back to town and his employers?

Ay, there are many of them now who shake their heads, and pointing to their fellows in the neighbouring counties, say: "If it 'adna been for our ould Parson we should a' been in the same fettle. Strikes mean

starvation, and when a man's clemmed" (hungry), "and' ain't got no one but hisself to thank for't, ay begins to look a fule, that ay does."

Mr. Halston employs three curates, to each of whom he gives a particular district, and they have every evening to bring in their reports of what goes on, and what they have done during the day. Eagerly sought after are these positions, for it is a well-known fact that, after their years of training at Copthorpe, if they are worth their salt they are pretty sure to tumble into a good berth. One thing is however made a *sine quâ non*—that during their stay they must do their share of work. "Duty first and pleasure afterwards," is the motto of the Rector, and he sees that it is strictly carried out.

Such is a brief description of the man who may be ranked among the best of sportsmen and truest of friends in Bullshire, or indeed any country in the world.

As a man and a friend he is full of the milk of human kindness, hospitable to a fault, and never so happy himself as when giving pleasure to others. As a sportsman, a bold and forward rider, yet always with excellent judgment, displaying as much knowledge of what a fox is likely to do as if he was being hunted himself; a knowledge of the country second to none, a capital judge of both horse and hound, and with a love of hunting that, as I have said, advancing years serve only to increase.

Small wonder that when Tom hears *his* "view hollo" he knows it is right, and gets forward at once, though there are those who may shout themselves hoarse without attracting the desired attention. "Parson's like my old Solomon," says he; "'e never throws his tongue till he's d——d well certain; but then, by Guy! 'e does let 'em have it."

Whenever it is possible Mr. Halston goes to cover with the hounds, and back again in the same company (unless called away by

parish work) after the day is over, and dearly does old Tom love those rides and cheery chats, learning himself, he freely admits, as much as ever he can teach. See them now both in the centre of the pack, jogging homeward in the failing light. Says Tom: "That was a straight-necked 'un we had to-day, sir; but I'm main puzzled what made you guess he'd try them earths at Billowdon."

"Well, Tom," replies the Rector, "I argued it out by common sense. Suppose you'd been hard pressed and knew of a house you could turn into, wouldn't you go for it?"

"Yes, but it was turning right into the mouths of the pack. I was 'nation mad when I found 'em open that I hadna ta'en your hint," continues the Huntsman.

"Live and learn, Tom; live and learn," laughs the Parson. "You forget three seasons ago we lost one just in the same place."

"By Guy! so we did, and I forgot it at the moment. It was the day as young Mayster Bell jumped atop of Melody; but

what's become of him, sir?" asks Tom. "How Sir John did pitch it into him that time to be sure."

"Oh, he's getting on first rate; he is inspector at the Deep-seam Pits. I was afraid, though, he was going to the bad at one time. He took a liking to the bottle; but Bliss's accident cured him," replies Mr. Halston. "But here we are at the kennels, and I must get on; I want to ride over to Halstead and see old Widow Greaves; she's a bit ailing; so good-night, Tom."

"Good-night, sir; good-night. See you out, I suppose, on Friday at Fearndale? Sure to find in the wood," says Tom, muttering to himself as he gets off his horse: "There's one of the best men in the world, danged if he ain't."

Mr. Halston is trotting along home, thinking over the events of the day and a hundred-and-one other things, when he is startled by the sudden reappearance of old Tom at his side, who, looking rather scared in answer to

his inquiry of "What's the matter?" says: "There's been a fearful accident at the pits, sir; my nephew's just come over. Explosion or summat; there's five-and-twenty poor chaps blocked up, 'e do say, and I thought you'd like to know on it."

Before Tom has well finished speaking, the Parson is urging his horse at best pace in the direction of the Deep-seam Pit, much to that animal's disgust. He pulls up at the first cottage he comes to, and, calling out a boy, sends him off to Copthorpe with a message to say where he has gone, and they need not expect him home at present, and that his groom is to ride Jerry over at once to take back his hunter.

"Look sharp, my lad," says he, tossing the boy a shilling, "and tell James to bring over my bottles with him—port and brandy—he'll know." And again he is on his way. On arriving at the scene of the accident he finds a large crowd of weeping women collected round the pit-mouth, making "con-

fusion worse confused," and seriously interfering with the work of salvation.

Amidst the universal grief and terror he is not noticed at first, but when men and women simultaneously recognise him, if ever a man had reason to be proud, surely Mr. Halston is that man, for such a shout is raised of "Here's t' ould Parson; God bless 'un! we knowed 'e'd come; it's right now," as tells him plainly the place he holds in the hearts of these rough men and sorrowing women.

"Here, take my horse," says he to one of the men; and as Bell comes up he asks: "What is being done?" "Volunteers for an exploring party," briefly answers the inspector; and Mr. Halston steps forward and addresses the crowd.

"My lads," he says, "I am an old man, and perhaps some of you will think it ain't my place to go down; but, thank God, I can still wield a pick with anyone, and with His help we'll get the boys out. No, Mr. Bell," as

the inspector tries to dissuade him; "if I ain't much use myself, they'll work all the better for having their Rector with them. And now one word to you, my daughters. You can do no good here. Go home, and get things ready for your husbands against the time we bring them up safe and sound. Now" (to the engineer) "we are ready. Steady, keep your breath for work, lads," as cheer after cheer rends the air; and in a few moments the group of brave volunteers are descending the shaft on their errand of mercy.

All through the night they toil, relieving each other in shifts, working as only men can work when the lives of fellow-creatures depend on their exertions. The Parson is everywhere, quiet, calm, and collected, encouraging and directing, yet taking all his share of manual labour.

Twice he has to be sent to the surface, faint and gasping for breath; but almost before his absence is detected, he is back again in the centre of the noble band.

By 2 A.M. the first six of the imprisoned miners are found, badly burned, but still alive; and before the sun has risen the whole of the twenty-five are restored to their wives, with the exception of three, whose work in this world is finished for ever.

Worn out as he is, Mr. Halston stops to comfort as best he can the fatherless and widow, and then Jerry carries him home. Men miss his kindly face at Fearndale on the Friday, but they know where he is, for the story of his heroism spreads far and wide; and when next he appears in the field, all press forward to do him honour. On the way to their first draw that day a fox jumps up in the open, and goes straight over Milston Brook. Tom has his hounds on the line in a crack, and before anyone has time to look round, three figures are seen sailing away over the grass on the far side of the water—Tom; Charles the First Whip, and, in front of all—the Parson.

THE DOCTOR.

"NEVER saw such weather or such a season in my life, Sir John. They tell us that 'a green winter makes a full churchyard,' but the saying doesn't hold good down here. Why, bless my heart, everybody's out hunting instead of being ill, and there's nothing for me to do at all."

"Ah Doctor," replies the Master, laughing, "it's better for us than for you then; and yet, in the long run, if the truth was known, I expect you can score more kills than my hounds."

A busy man is Edward Wilson, Esq., M.D., with an increasing practice necessitating the

help of an assistant. Yet so devoted is he to hunting, that he thinks it a very hard case if he does not manage one day a-week with the hounds. As he rides up, the picture of robust health and the pink of neatness, one would scarcely imagine, as one listens to his chaffing about the weather and the paucity of patients, that he had had exactly two hours' sleep the night before, and was almost certain to find a message on his return home, calling him away some seven or eight miles, with the prospect of another nocturnal vigil. Yet such is the case. Yesterday afternoon, when he came back from his round, he had said to Thomas his coachman: "I shall manage a day to-morrow, Thomas; I don't think there is anything likely to happen, so have old Ladybird ready for me in the morning. They meet at Willowfield Lodge, and are certain to draw towards home."

Just as he was going to bed, a groom from Lorton Towers came galloping into his yard with an urgent message "As 'ow Doctor wur

wanted at once; Lady Slowboy's took bad;" and away he had to go to assist the future Lord Slowboy on his "first appearance on any stage."

"Hang it all; she might have put it off," he said to himself as he buttoned his coat; "but I'm not going to lose my day's hunting for fifty heirs of Lorton;" and at 5.30 A.M., the ceremony being over, before turning in he gave orders that he was to be called at half-past seven, and at half-past ten he arrives, as we see him, hale and hearty, at Willowfield Lodge.

Very well mounted is the Doctor, for he knows a horse when he sees one; and though he only keeps two—or rather, as he himself puts it, "one and a half" (the second one having to take him occasionally on professional trips)—they are both something above the average, and when hounds are running, Ladybird or Precipitate, the two horses, are pretty nearly certain to be seen in the van. It does not require a second glance at the keen

eyes, the determined mouth, wreathed in a cheery smile, and the strong nervous hands, to show that before one is a man of iron will.

Prompt of decision, quick at diagnosing disease, with a heart full of sympathy for suffering, yet never faltering when forced to resort to the knife, Edward Wilson has made a name for himself second to none in that part of England. Indeed, over and over again his old friend and patron, Sir George Fennel, the great London physician, has urged him to migrate to town; but his answer is always the same:

"Couldn't live through one season. I must be in the fresh air; and if I did not see hounds now and then, I should pine away. Besides, I should miss all my old friends in Bullshire so; and as for fame, old Widow Fletcher and John Billings the blacksmith would not believe you if you told them there was a cleverer man than myself living! Poor souls! it shows their ignorance; but what more can I want?"

The Doctor is quite right. Among the poor he and the Parson run a neck-and-neck race for popularity. Perhaps from the fact of being associated with that, to them, great mystery—medicine—the Doctor is held in greater awe; but they all remember how, hand-in-hand, the two fought death in the fever-time; and the great authorities I have mentioned—the widow and the blacksmith—assert that "Doctor ay does know summat about rheumatiz; ay's got some stuff as sends it away all in a jiff like."

It is fifteen years ago since Edward Wilson, then five-and-twenty, came down to Bullshire as assistant to old Dr. Johnstone. He rather astonished the methodical old practitioner with his theories, for the young Doctor, whose whole soul was in his profession, had read deeply and judiciously, and was far in advance of the old-fashioned routine of blood-letting, cupping, and Epsom salts.

At first folks shook their heads, and muttered "Quackery;" but one or two bad

cases, which had been given over as hopeless by the principal, being successfully pulled through by the assistant, they began to think that after all there was something in the young fellow; and the surgical skill he displayed when, together with every other available medical man, he was called to the scene of the fearful railway accident at Billingdon, confirmed their opinion.

A year after this, old Johnstone died suddenly, and Wilson, after a brisk competition, bought his practice. Directly he felt himself his own master, he allowed his ideas a free scope, and consequently in a very short time his undoubted talent made itself known throughout the country-side, and the practice increased so enormously that, young and energetic as he was, he found it necessary to take an assistant, choosing after much deliberation the son of an old college chum and fellow-student.

"Why, Doctor, who'd have thought of seeing you to-day? I thought you were at

Lorton all last night," exclaims Mr. Noble, Lord Slowboy's agent, who rides up as Sir John finishes his repartee.

"So I was, Noble," replies our M.D., "but her ladyship, I am thankful to say, let me off at half-past five; and, as I was just telling Sir John, there being nothing else for me to do this weather, I thought I would come out on the chance of a job in the field."

"I hope you may be disappointed, then, for once. What a blood-thirsty villain! Did you ever hear such a thing, Boulter?" says the Master to the Secretary, who has just arrived on a new steed.

"Hear what?" rejoins that worthy.

"Why," continues Sir John, "the Doctor here says he saw you pass his window on that new horse, and has come out to follow in your wake all day, as he feels convinced you will break your neck, leg, or arm, or do something which he can turn into a fee."

"Don't you believe it," interrupts Mr. Wilson with a laugh; "it would not pay me to mend you, for directly you got well you'd be dunning me for a subscription, and I might whistle for my fees. But look at Tom; he evidently thinks it is time to be moving. Who-ho, old lady" (to his horse), "who-ho," as old Tom, having got the signal, trots by with the pack, and, lifting his cap in response to the Doctor's greeting, says:

"Main glad to see you out, Doctor; hope we shall find a good 'un for you."

In a few minutes the hounds are thrown in, and Mr. Wilson finds himself with Mr. Halston (the clergyman) and Charles at a convenient corner of the covert. As bad luck will have it, though, the fox breaks away on the far side.

"Bless my soul, this is rough," exclaims the Doctor; "come on;" and putting old Ladybird at the fence he goes crashing through the wood, followed by his two companions. As they emerge on the other side

they see the hounds streaming away some three fields off below them, and have the satisfaction of knowing that for once they have got as bad a start as could well be.

"It's for Blessington Osiers," says Charles. "If we cut across to the left and over the brook we shall hit it off."

"You are right, Charles," rejoins the Parson. "What do you say, Wilson?"

"For'ard on, then," replies the Doctor; and the trio gallop off almost in a contrary direction to the hounds. They negotiate the water in safety, and pull up by the side of the Osiers just as the hunted fox enters them. Charles rides off to the bottom end to view him through, and as Tom comes up with the pack his "Tailly-ho, for'ard a-w-a-i-y!" proclaims the fact that Reynard has not found Blessington a place of rest.

"Why, where the deuce have you arrived from?" is the universal question asked by all the field.

"Home," says the Doctor with a chuckle,

as he sets Ladybird going now in her proper place—in the front rank—and swings over a nasty fence with a double ditch. As he lands on the other side he notices the Secretary's nephew, a young lad who is riding a chestnut that is evidently as much as the boy can manage, and as his eye falls on the stiff timber which appears at the far end of the field he wonders what will happen. "Don't go too fast at the rails, my boy," he says. "Steady. My G—d, what a smash!" as the impetuous brute rushes at the fence, and, breasting the top rail, turns a regular somersault, throwing the boy, luckily, clear of him.

The Doctor is off his horse in a moment, and hounds and hunting are forgotten as he kneels by the side of the pale little face, supporting the lad's head on his breast, and feeling with professional skill for any injury.

"Stand back, gentlemen, please," he exclaims, as some of the field collect round.

"Give the boy air. There's nothing wrong beyond a slight shock and a broken arm. Ah Boulter, don't be alarmed," as the Secretary rides up. "Get him in a cart, and drive him home. I'll be round and set his arm directly."

"I'm all right, uncle," says the nephew, who has revived after a pull at the Doctor's flask. "Let me go on."

"No, my boy, you can't go on. You've broken your arm, and will have to be quiet for a bit," replies Mr. Boulter.

"What a bore!" ejaculates the lad; but adds, with a twinkle in his eye, "You'll have to pay Doctor Wilson a fee after all, uncle."

Everybody laughs at this, and the Doctor mutters under his breath: "That's what I call pluck." Then, trotting off home to fetch his paraphernalia, he is at The Grange almost as soon as the invalid. After making him comfortable, the Doctor has to go off on other errands of mercy, and as he drives the seven miles to visit his next patient, he tells Thomas

that he is sorry to have missed the end of the run, but if anything could repay him it is the amount of pluck shown by the Secretary's little nephew.

Once a year he takes a two months' holiday, in July and August, when he, together with three old college chums, may be seen clad in blue serge and drinking in great draughts of health on the deck of the yacht which belongs to the eldest of them. They generally wind up with a fortnight at the grouse, and then the Doctor returns to Bullshire with renewed life and with a fund of anecdote and adventures by sea and land, to hear him relate which is as good for a sick man as any of the prescriptions which he writes in his peculiarly neat handwriting.

Wherever he goes, castle or cottage, hall or homestead, his presence always cheers and lights up the sick-room, and Doctor Wilson's visit is looked forward to by the invalid as the pleasantest bit of his long day.

THE DEALERS.

"YES, sir, he's a niceish little horse, up to a goodish bit of weight too, and carries a lady. My daughter rides him often, and she says he's as handy as a kitten."

There is nothing very remarkable about the speaker, and but for the undeniable bit of "good stuff" he is riding, one would scarcely notice him in the crowd assembled at the meet.

As he turns half round to make the foregoing remark, allowing his right hand to rest on his horse's flank, a dark bay of wondrous shape, one may perhaps be struck with the peculiar look of shrewdness displayed in his

eyes, and notice the ease with which he sits in his saddle; but beyond that there is nothing at first sight to mark a difference from any other man in the field.

But Mr. James Holden the Dealer, more generally known as Old Jimmy Holden, is something out of the common.

First, he is one of the best judges of a horse in England, with some forty years' experience to back him.

Secondly, he is a man of the keenest perception. In two seconds he will sum you up as well as if he had been acquainted with you for a lifetime, and knows intuitively at a glance how much you are "good for."

Thirdly, he is one of the best and neatest riders imaginable, with a supreme contempt for such superfluous matter as nerves. Being possessed of hands of silk and will of iron, he can hand a raw young 'un over the stiffest country in the hunt, and make him perform as well as a thoroughly seasoned hunter.

Lastly, he is absolutely trustworthy—that

is to say, if you tell him that you want a horse and cannot afford more than such-and-such a sum, he will supply you with the best article that can be got for the money, frankly telling you any defects, and leaving himself but a fair margin of profit. If, however, a purchaser thinks himself very knowing and pits himself against Jimmy Holden, it is long odds that that bumptious individual, the purchaser, will find himself in the wrong box, for Jimmy takes a pleasure in getting what he calls "six to four the best of a knowing card."

He displays a vast amount of *esprit de corps* concerning his own hunt, always keeping the pick of the bunch for some of his Bullshire customers. "You see," he says with a smile, "I meet them all out in the field, and if I was to come across any of my gents riding one of my 'osses that I knew to be a bad 'un, why I could not say good-morning with a free conscience or a light heart. That horse would be always staring me in the face, and making me uncomfortable."

To outsiders, however, he does not always show so much compunction, as the following anecdote will show. There was a young cotton lord who one season came down to stay with one of the members of the Bullshire for a month's hunting, and, being in want of a horse, was advised to go to Mr. Holden. Exceedingly knowing in matters of horseflesh did this young gentleman consider himself, and as he was rolling in wealth he also gave himself pretty considerable airs.

Accordingly he despatched the following epistle to Freshfield, where Jimmy's house and stables were situated: "Mr. Tinsel, being in want of a hunter, and hearing that James Holden is an honest dealer, will thank him to bring over two or three for his inspection to-morrow to The Shrubbery. Mr. Tinsel begs to say he requires a good horse and not a screw."

Now old Jimmy Holden was not accustomed to this sort of thing. He had, with his father before him, become quite an institution in the

Bullshire country, and everybody knowing what a right-down good sportsman he was, always treated him more as an equal than anything else, or at all events with respect and in good-fellowship. Indeed it was considered rather a privilege to buy one of his horses, and his company in the field was always sought after, where his fund of anecdote and quaint humour were wont to keep everybody in a roar. Therefore it may be imagined that the letter rubbed him up the wrong way in no slight degree, and not a word did he vouchsafe in reply.

The next time the hounds met, Mr. Tinsel, who was riding one of his friend's horses, came up to him and said, in a most offensive way: "You are Holden, the horse-dealer, ain't you?"

"My name is Holden, sir," replied old Jimmy, looking over the top of the young snob's head.

"Well, then, why the devil did not you answer my letter? I want a horse, and told you to bring me over two or three to look at,"

continued young Manchester. "Is that your sort of way of doing business? because it ain't mine."

"I presume, sir, your name is Tinsel. If so, I beg to inform you that I am not in the habit of bringing over horses for strangers to look at. If you like to drive over to Freshfield, my foreman will show you one at my stables," said Jimmy, and straightway rode off fuming, while a visible smile was seen on the faces of all those within hearing.

"Sell him The Baron," said two or three of them; "it will serve him right."

The Baron was a grand-looking beast, whose appearance had deceived the wily James into buying him over in the "Land of the Shamrock;" but with his good looks his virtues came to an end, for he was without exception the veriest brute to ride imaginable, being a confirmed bolter, with no mouth, and with an awkward habit, if he did manage to get rid of his rider, of rushing at him open-mouthed, or else trying to kick his brains out.

He had been tried at everything, but it was always the same, whether in saddle or harness; he was a regular man-eating savage.

Hitherto Holden had refused absolutely to part with him, though he had had more than one offer; but so outraged were his feelings on this occasion that he took the advice given, and Mr. Tinsel shortly became the owner of The Baron in exchange for a cheque for two hundred pounds.

It must be owned that at the last moment Jimmy relented, and told the young gentleman he had better not buy; but with the obstinacy of ignorance Tinsel insisted on the bargain, and so had his way.

The result was a foregone conclusion. The first day he took him out the brute ran away with him for six miles straight on end, jumping into the river to wind up with, from which predicament Mr. Tinsel was rescued just in time to save him from a watery grave.

The Baron emerged safely on the far side, and when caught was there and then despatched

to town for sale without reserve, being followed in a couple of days by his owner. This, however, happened some years ago, and Jimmy Holden does not care to say very much about it now.

As the hounds move off, one of the field, a Mr. Briggs, finds it impossible to help breaking the tenth commandment and coveting the little bay, and when he sees the easy way in which the animal pops over the stiff rails out of the big grass-meadow, making as little of them as if they were a flight of hurdles, while he himself has been in vain looking all round for a convenient gate, the covetous desire increases, and a settled determination takes possession of him to become the owner or perish in the attempt.

Meanwhile Jimmy has noted all this, and though that jump seemed so carelessly and easily done, he well knows the value of it, and is quite prepared to hear Mr. Briggs say, as he does: "Is that bay for sale, Holden?"

"All my horses are for sale, sir," he replies

with a smile; adding, after a pause, "at a price."

Thereupon Briggs tries to look as if he was not the least interested in the matter, and accordingly shows most plainly how anxious he is to buy. "Oh, ah, yes," says he, "he seems likely to make a hunter. How much do you ask?"

"Well, sir, seeing that you are an old customer, I will let you have him at a hundred and twenty; but take my advice, Mr. Briggs, and when you are buying don't show as you're so sweet on the animal; it's as good as putting another five-and-twenty guineas on the price. However, you shall try him the day after to-morrow, and if you like the horse, which I am sure you will, you can have him at the price I said."

Needless to say Mr. Briggs *does* like him, and a piece of paper signed with his name transfers one hundred and twenty guineas to the account of James Holden at the local bank, though it must be confessed that the little bay

does not perform quite so brilliantly under his new master's guidance as he did on the occasion when the exhibition at the rails so delighted his heart.

It was not to be supposed that Jimmy Holden would be left for ever in undisputed possession of such a lucrative position as dealer-in-ordinary to the Bullshire Hunt, and at one time there was quite an influx of veterinary surgeons, job-masters, and copers of all sorts; but they all dropped off and disappeared with the exception of one individual, who was a constant thorn in Jimmy's side, and whom he hated with a hate surpassing that of women (the inverse applies equally to the fair sex, love and hatred both being qualities they excel in).

He was named Seaford—Captain Seaford he called himself, though the Army List was innocent and silent as to his name or his regiment.

"A nasty, snivelling, horse-coping snob,"

was Jimmy's verdict; "brings discredit on the profession, and makes people think as we're all rogues."

There was a deal of truth in this, for Seaford was as big a scamp as ever doctored a broken-winded nag or bishoped an old stager. Now and then he had a good horse, but it was the exception; and when such an accident did happen it was a wonder that he ever managed to shut his mouth again, so wide did he open it.

Farmer Simms used to say on those occasions: "Ay could see right through un' like a telescope."

A most plausible scoundrel is he notwithstanding, and if he manages to get hold of some new-comer he will stick to him like a leech till he has screwed something out of him. Of course he hunts, and equally of course he arrives rather late, not being over fond of letting his wares get cool—and stiff—at the meet.

He is mounted, perhaps, on a raking-

looking chestnut mare. There is a good deal of "furniture" about her, such as breast-plate and martingale; the throat-strap is broad, and the band across the forehead is blue and white enamel. That the mare can jump there is no doubt, for she sails over the big bank and ditch in rare form, and for two or three fields (Captain) Seaford is in front. After a little he is to be seen on another animal, which, when there are enough people round to see, can perform nearly as well as the chestnut, who is now on her way home. If anyone happens to meet her they will be somewhat surprised to see how lame she goes. "Run a nail into 'er 'oof," is the groom's version; but an F.R.C.V.S. would be puzzled to find that nail, and his certificate would show the lameness to proceed from a very different cause.

It is a marvel how Seaford manages to "pick up" so many flats, but he does a thriving trade; and though occasionally he has to square an unpleasant business, he has

always a plausible tale ready to hand, and so comes out with merely a scratch on his somewhat shady character.

Once he outdid himself, and was as nearly put in prison as ever he wishes to be. It happened as follows. One evening, late, a couple of fur-capped individuals brought a horse into his yard and asked him if he would buy. A glance showed him the animal was valuable, and the price asked being only twenty pounds Seaford naturally concluded that it was a stolen one. However, he argued, it was nothing to do with him, and bought it there and then. Next day the police found it in his stables, and hard work it was for the Freshfield lawyer to prevent the magistrates committing the gallant Captain as a receiver of stolen goods.

The reason for his having incurred Jimmy's hatred is because he was sharp enough once, soon after he had come into the country, to sell him a broken-winded nag; and Jimmy

never hears the last of it to this day. However, he swears he will be "even with the scamp yet," and being a man of his word there is little doubt but that he will.

THE GRUMBLER.

A VERY enthusiastic individual is Mr. Bowles, J.P., or, as he is more generally called, The Major, from his connection with the local Volunteer force, which, it may almost be said, he founded. Liberal with his money, and at heart a good fellow and keen sportsman, his one great failing is the use, or abuse, of that Englishman's acknowledged privilege—grumbling.

He is never happy unless he is finding fault with something or somebody. No matter what it is, the stars in their courses have always conspired against him personally, or some unfortunate person has done the

very thing they should not have done, and so brought the matter in hand to utter grief.

Of course if they had listened to the Major everything would have progressed swimmingly; but as his opinions were seldom given until the fiasco had occurred (if occur it did), and even then were conflicting—not to say contradictory—recourse was seldom had to that fount of advice. It is generally whispered in Bullshire that when Bowles, after an infinity of trouble and expense, managed to inspire a certain amount of military enthusiasm sufficient for the formation of the corps of Bullshire Rifles, he refused to accept the command of them, in order that he might afterwards be able to say:

"Just like my luck; took all the trouble of getting the thing up, and then they go and put in a man over my head. A man, sir, who does not know his right hand from his left; a duffer, sir; a rank impostor, who calls himself Colonel, and is as ignorant of the drill-

book as—— But, there; it's always the same."

As a magistrate and justice of the peace he is equally aggrieved. Witnesses somehow never can give their evidence in a straightforward manner, and the decisions of the Bench afford him vast scope for criticism. "Never heard of such a thing," he will tell you. "Man brought up for poaching. Found with a gun, going along the road. Asked what he was doing. Said he was taking it to be mended. Would you believe it? They dismissed the case, notwithstanding all I could say. Gave him the benefit of the doubt, sir; and they call that justice, by Heaven!"

It is no use pointing out that ample evidence was produced at the inquiry to show that the man's story was correct, he was taking the gun to be mended, and an over-zealous local policeman had, as is by no means unusual, exceeded his duty. The Major will reply that he knows, and if the magistrates don't choose to exercise their powers,

every loafer in Bullshire will be carrying a gun to be mended.

A stranger would naturally suppose from this that Mr. Bowles was not blessed with much heart; but he would be wrong. For it is a well-known fact that often when, in his official capacity, he has been forced to fine some poor devil who had been "looking on the wine when it was red"—or rather the beer when it was amber—and the sight had been too much for him, the Major, after the bench had dispersed, would drive round to the delinquent's cottage and gladden the sorrowing wife by putting into her hand double the amount of the fine that had been inflicted.

In the hunting-field he is looked upon as a standing joke, and if there are signs of a cover being blank, or a long wait at a cold corner, there is sure to be a party made up to "draw" the Major, the best of it being that he never sees men are laughing at him, but lays down the law, and abuses, condemns, and

complains with the utmost heartiness and volubility.

Though a good horseman and forward rider, he never knows one horse from another if they are anything at all alike in colour; and it is the same with dogs. If you were to put any of his own retrievers along with some others, and ask him to point out those which belonged to him, he could not do it to save his life. Two rather funny incidents happened to him from this cause, the first with a horse, and the second concerning a dog.

One season he had a particularly good-looking bay, but finding it too hot for him he determined to sell, and so sent it up to London to a dealer, whom, when old Jimmy Holden had nothing that suited, he was wont to employ, getting a hundred guineas for it. A short time after he went to town himself, and going to the same man's yard was struck with the appearance of a good-looking bay, and bought it at a hundred and forty guineas. When the horse came down to his stables the

stud-groom came in and said to him: "Why, sir, you didn't tell me as how you'd bought The Prince again."

"Prince, you fool," replied the Major; "I've not bought The Prince."

But he had, and had also paid forty guineas, besides railway fares, for the animal's trip to London and back.

The other affair, though perhaps almost telling more against himself, was not so expensive. He had given his friend, Lord Acres, a black retriever with a high character and a long pedigree, and had made no little parade of the gift. A few weeks afterwards he was shooting at Home Wood (Acres' place), and the dog was out. According to his usual custom, Bowles was grumbling at everything; guns, birds, cartridges, weather, and his servant all came in for their share. At last he pitched on the dog, and turning to his host during the process of lunch, he said: "Can't think, Acres, where you manage to pick up your dogs! Look at that mongrel brute there. Never

saw such a beast in my life. He's only fit to run behind a butcher's cart."

"Why, Major," replied his lordship, roaring with laughter, "that's looking a gift-horse in the mouth with a vengeance. It's your own dog that you gave me."

Bowles acknowledges now that for once in his life he wishes he had not spoken.

It is a beautiful morning for hunting. The late frost—which, though it lasted but a week, was sharp—is well out of the ground, and everybody who owns anything with four legs, besides a number who are dependent on their own, have turned out with the hounds at Mickleborough Green.

The landlord of The Three Bells, that quaint old inn—with its remains of past glories, as shown by its spacious coach-stables—which stands back from the road facing the green, is doing a roaring trade; and Lizzie the bar-maid says her "arms do just ache a-drawing the beer." The hounds gathered round old

Tom on the green, with pink coats dotted here and there, present as pretty a picture as one could wish to see. All are in high spirits and congratulating each other and themselves on the change in the weather and the prospects of a run. Chaff is flying thick about "the old mare's big leg," or "the lucky thing the frost was for that young horse who was pulled out on all occasions;" and old Tom comes in for his share, being told that "both the hounds and himself look as if they had been doing themselves well on those non-hunting days—waistcoat buttons a bit tight, eh Tom?" and such-like banter.

Presently, along the road the Major appears, in company with Mr. Boulter the Secretary, and young Earnshaw, who is learning farming —by hunting four days a-week—with Mr. Noble.

"Here's Bowles," say two or three sportsmen; "he can't find much to grumble at to-day, anyhow."

As he rides up they greet him with a

hearty "Good-morning, Major; lovely day, isn't it?"

"Lovely day? Lovely fiddlestick!" is the reply. "Up to your neck in mud. Country so heavy you can't ride, and then of all places to pick out Mickleborough! Why, the water will be out all over the bottom. But there, it's always the same. I told Lappington he ought to meet at the Kennels; but nobody ever listens to me."

"Well, but Bowles," interrupts the Secretary; "we met at the Kennels the last fixture before the frost."

"And you ought to meet the first day after. By Heavens, I'd meet every day there till the country was fit to ride," grumbles the Major. "Look at the hounds too. Why, Tom must have got the whole pack out, and borrowed some besides. Now I ask you, can we expect any sport with such a pack as that? 'Pon my soul the Hunt's going to the devil."

"Short of work, Major; must give 'em a

bit of exercise," puts in the Huntsman, as Bowles rides off to anathematise the landlord of The Three Bells, for presuming to offer him a glass of "d——d muddy home-brewed," calling, however, for a second edition of the same. By this time the Master has arrived and there is a general bustle, a tightening of girths, a shortening of stirrups, and the usual preparations for a start. The word goes round that the first draw will be Mickleborough Wood, and Tom with the hounds is already on his way there before it reaches the ear of the Major, at that moment engaged in an altercation with his servant, who, according to Bowles, has put a wrong bridle on his second horse, but, according to the man himself, has only obeyed his master's instructions.

No sooner does he hear the appointed place than he gives up the bridle argument, and making his way to where the Master and others are trotting down the lane, commences: "You don't mean to say, Lappington, you're going to put them into the Wood? Why, we

shall never get away, and the rides will be impassable. My good sir, just think. Here, some of you fellows, try and persuade him, he never listens to me, nobody ever does;" adding, under his breath, "never heard such d——d folly in my life."

"Why, Bowles," replies Sir John, laughing, "you said a minute ago that the bottoms would be under water, and now you object to the high ground. Where would you go to, you old growler?"

"Growler be hanged; I never grumble. But it is a little bit too much, when one comes out for a day's hunting, to be turned loose into a forest of trees growing on a bog. The man who planted Mickleborough Wood ought to have been hung," says Bowles.

What more he might have added will never be known, for at this instant a ringing view hollo is heard, and the hounds are away full cry, a fox having jumped up in a spinney on the road to the Wood.

"Just like my luck," the Major is heard

to ejaculate, as he puts his nag at the fence out of the lane. "Whenever I try and give anybody advice they tell me I am growling. Hold up, you awkward devil," to his horse, who pecks a bit on landing. "And here have I been wasting my time teaching a pack of idiots how to hunt the country, and lost my start."

After running hard for a quarter of an hour, the hounds check in a road, half the pack having flashed over the line.

Here the Major is in his glory, and holds forth. "What did I say this morning? If they will bring out every hound in the kennel, how can they expect them to hunt. Look there, now; look there. What the devil's the use of taking them up the road? The fox is for'ard, I'll wager. 'Pon my oath, I believe old Tom is getting past his work. There's that young ass, Simms, too, messing about —always in the way. I should like to know how he finds time to hunt. Every farmer seems to be able to do everything nowadays, and

when they want to pay their corn-bill they cry out about the weather and ask for a reduction of rent."

"Not quite so bad as all that, Major," exclaim one or two farmers, who think it time to stick up for their characters. "Not quite so bad as all that. We likes to ride as well as anyone, and we likes to see others enjoy themselves over our land. But there, we know you don't mean it."

Just then, as if to convict the Major, Harbinger hits off the line up the road, and they are away again a cracker, Bowles coming in for plenty of chaff about the fox being for'ard and Tom being past his work.

To give him his due, he was right when he blamed the country, for it is precious heavy, and plenty of grief is the order of the day. The scent, too, improving with every hundred yards, it becomes hard work to live with them. Sir John, as usual, is well up, and a few others are close in his wake, among them Bowles, whose coat, by-the-way, shows evident signs

of contact with mother-earth—a catastrophe that was brought about, he says, "by the idiotic way that people mend their fences, with a great rail run through them."

However, when, after an hour and ten minutes, they run to ground, even he is fain to allow that they have had a real good thing, though he qualifies the admission with a few scathing remarks on the slovenly way in which the earths are stopped: "A disgrace to the country, by Heaven!"

Riding home he asks a few men to dinner the next day at his house, amongst them Sir John Lappington and Mr. Wilson the Doctor —in case of accidents, he says. His invitation is eagerly accepted, for his dinners are proverbial and his wine undeniable. To see him at his own table you would scarcely know him again for the same man. The grumbling has all been got over before the guests arrive; and as you drive home—with that comfortable feeling of having dined well, wisely, and in pleasant company—you bear away a cheerful

remembrance of witty sayings and thorough good-fellowship, of a countenance beaming with fun, and stories which, if you wake in the night and think of, will cause you to laugh afresh.

Nearly all these happy feelings and memories you may safely put down to the skill of your host the Major, whose sole failing, as I have said, lies in the fact that, from habit, in the field, he has become a Grumbler.

THE LADY WHO HUNTS AND RIDES.

WILDMERE HOUSE is a favourite meet with the Bullshire, consequently there is always a large field out at that fixture, every class of sportsman being represented, both those who mean business and those who merely come to partake of the good cheer offered them, and afterwards, when hounds begin to run, retire into the background, unless, indeed, some handy highroad lies parallel to the chase, when they reappear, splashed with mud, and enthusiastic *ad nauseam*.

Most hospitable of entertainers is Colonel Talford, who occupies The House; and with

his pretty wife to assist him, there is little fear of any complaints being heard as to the quality or quantity of the breakfast. Equally certain is old Tom that a real straight-necked good-hearted fox is ready for him either in the Home Wood or Ravenshill Copse, for the Colonel makes it a rule with his keepers that there shall be foxes, and they know well that his rules are like the laws of the Medes and Persians—unalterable.

"No foxes, no keepers," is what he says; and if the quarry is not forthcoming, unless a very good reason can be given, go they have to.

He once came upon Velveteens in the act of burying a fox that he had trapped and knocked on the head—or, to be more accurate, Mrs. Talford, who was riding back from the Dairy Farm, saw the funeral going on, and told her husband. The man was a new keeper, who had been with him barely a month, and as a keeper was considered quite first-class. But there and then the Colonel

went out, had the fox dug up, and made the man take it over to Sir John Lappington, riding himself all the way behind him to see that he did it.

Through the main street of the village they went in procession, the men (for it was evening) turning out and hooting the unfortunate vulpecide; and when he had delivered his burden and apologised, the Colonel said: "Now you can go back and pack up your things; this is your last day in my service." His wages were paid that night, and in spite of all entreaties, the next day he left Colonel Talford and Bullshire for ever.

It is a lovely morning as Tom rides up with his beauties in front of the house, and, saluting the host and hostess, tosses off the glass of sparkling ale that is handed to him. There had been a catch of frost on the Monday, and folks learned in weather-lore had predicted a hard time; but nothing came of it, for a shower of rain on Tuesday night had utterly routed the destroyer of sport; and

on the Thursday at Wildmere it is as fine a hunting-day as one could wish—if anything perhaps a shade too warm.

"We must give them a few minutes, Sir John," says Mrs. Talford to the Master, who has just arrived. "The Melton train is late, and there are always a few who honour us on this occasion by trying to cut us all down."

"Certainly, Mrs. Talford," replies Lappington, smiling and taking out his watch. "We will give them a quarter of an hour; but you need not be so fearfully sarcastic about the Meltonians. I think it is generally the other way. If I remember rightly, I have seen a lady on a horse called Queen Bee who generally requires a great deal of cutting down, and I have heard it said that this same lady is impossible to beat."

"Nonsense, Sir John; you know that if I do manage to get over the country it is all the Queen's doing, not mine. She's a dear, is not she? But come in and have something; my husband wants to see you about drawing the

Copse first," rejoins Mrs. Talford, leading the way into the dining-room, and evidently pleased at the Master's flattery.

In a quarter of an hour, the Melton detachment having come up, the signal is given to move, and a long cavalcade trot off for Ravenshill. A minute or two later two horses are seen cantering across the grass to catch up the hounds; one carries Colonel Talford, and the other (the redoubtable Queen Bee) his wife.

As they come up and press forward to where Tom's white head is seen bobbing in the middle of the pack, men point her out, and you hear a whisper of "There she is, that's her—riding the same horse too; by Jove, old fellow, it's all very well to say 'only a woman,' but if you can beat her you'll do. Why, the last time we met here she cut us all down and hung us up to dry; only rode one horse all day. Dick Valpy had three out, and you know how he can ride; but I'm blessed if he didn't get nearly drowned in

the brook, while she sailed over it as if it was nothing. We'd been running for forty minutes then, but she can save her horse as well as ride, I can tell you."

Some who have not seen her express their doubts, and vow that "No woman ever beat them yet, and, by gad, sir, they never shall;" but they do not know Mrs. Talford or Queen Bee, and before the day is over they will tell another tale.

Yet you would never take her for a hard rider, though anyone at a glance can see she is a finished horsewoman. Nothing could possibly be quieter than her turn-out. A well-fitting, well-cut, rough cloth habit, rather short; a neat white silk handkerchief tied and folded round a high stand-up linen collar, just showing, like a man's scarf, where the habit is made with a step; a small black felt hat, of the kind known as a "billycock," covering her well-shaped head, the hair of which is gathered into a small knot behind; while in her hand she carries a hunting-crop, made of a holly

that she herself cut from the lawn in front of the house.

Her seat is easy yet firm, and very square on her saddle. Those small hands too, which look as if they could hurt no living thing, can hold and control a puller with wondrous power, a fact her horses seem to recognise directly she takes up the reins of her bridle, for they go so quietly under her hand that one is forced to wonder what it was that made them fret and tear in such a disagreeable way when Mrs. A—— or Lady B—— claimed them for their own, in the days before they found that they were "too much for them," and had to sell them to the Colonel at a discount.

With all this, as she, having ranged up alongside of the pack, pulls up Queen Bee into a trot, and pats the neck of that more than perfect animal, one cannot help a feeling of astonishment that so slight and delicate-looking a woman should be able to go so hard; and in our inmost hearts we feel that if we could lay claim to half as straight a course as

Mrs. Talford we should not hide our light quite so much under a bushel as she does.

They are close to the Copse now, and Mrs. Talford and the Colonel slip down to the far side with Charles; the right of proprietorship allowing this, which is courteously yet firmly forbidden to the rest of the field.

"Gentlemen," says the Master, "for your own sport I wish the whole of the left side and bottom of the covert kept free. It's a clear start either way, therefore I must beg you not to get for'ard. Give the fox a chance, and then, so long as you don't ride over the hounds, go as you like."

Someone suggests that the Colonel and his wife have gone down to the bottom, whereupon Sir John shuts him up by saying: "That, sir, is only another reason why nobody else should go. When we draw your coverts we will allow you to go where you like, and keep the rest out of your way."

As the individual happens to be a gentleman who has only that season come down to

Bullshire, and has not subscribed as yet to the hounds, the remark causes a general titter, and the man wishes he had not spoken.

His discomfiture is, however, of short duration, for at this instant the hounds find, and from the chorus and way they rattle him up and down the covert it is clear that they are not far behind their fox. Two rings round the Wood and he finds it too hot to hold him, so away he goes across the slope in full view of the whole field.

"Hold hard one moment, gentlemen," shouts the Master, as Tom, horn in hand, tops the wood fence, and claps the hounds on to the line.

"Now"—and a hundred or more horses are rattling down the hill towards the fence at the bottom.

Some visibly diminish their pace as they near the obstacle, and some make a determined point to the gate in the corner, which a friendly yeoman is holding open. But there is little time to notice all this, for the pace is

a cracker, and the scent is breast-high. Two or three loose horses are careering about the next field, and two or three dismounted riders are running after them.

"Catch hold, sir," says young Simms, as he stops one of the horses and delivers him up to his owner; "catch hold—I can't stop;" and he is over the next bank and ditch before the spilt one has recovered the effects of his acrobatic performance.

Such a jam at the double post and rails! There are but three or four negotiable places, and everybody is racing for them madly. The Parson and the Doctor fly them together, and so shake themselves clear of the ruck, while a hard-riding Meltonian carries away a heap of them.

But where is Mrs. Talford?

There she is on the left, close to the hounds, yet well wide of them, slipping along with an easy grace, looking as if she was merely cantering, Queen Bee taking everything before her, and making as little of the fences as if

they were the lowest of hurdles. How the deuce did she get there? everybody who has time to notice her wonders. But no one ever knows how she does get anywhere. No matter what sort of a start she gets, unless hopelessly thrown out Mrs. Talford before long is certain to be found sailing along in close proximity to the hounds.

Presently they come to a check in the road, but it is only for a minute, for Beadsman hits off the line on the far side, over the wall, and across the fallows. Some of the road-riders come up at this moment, and stare blankly at the wall. One, a stranger, seeing a lady, and not knowing who she is, vainly endeavours to open the gate (a low one), which is locked, and thereby prevents anybody else getting over.

"Thank you, sir; I think I can manage it," is all Mrs. Talford says in her quiet way, and in another minute the would-be "pew-opener" is greeted with a sight of Queen Bee's hind feet, and the lady has resumed her former place with the hounds.

"Well done, Mrs. Colonel!" says old Tom (he always calls her Mrs. Colonel). "We shall show them the road again to-day. It's the old line, straight for Marston. Hold up," to his horse, who dropped his hind legs in a ditch. "Yonder he goes," as he catches sight of the fox making the best of his way up the rising ground in the distance; and, contrary to his usual custom, he catches hold of the hounds and lifts them for nearly half a mile, thereby cutting off a big slice.

"Oh Tom, you shouldn't have done that," says Mrs. Talford, as soon as they have settled on to the line again. "They were hunting beautifully."

"Don't mean anyone to get in front of the Queen, Mrs. Colonel, this time," is all he vouchsafes as they gallop down a lane, thereby saving their horses, and nicking in again at the corner. A hollo from the right, close in front of the hounds, shows the rest of the field that the end is approaching, and the Melton detachment are riding their hardest to catch

the Bullshire lady; but the only men who have as yet succeeded are Mr. Halston, the Master, and old Simms.

"It's over the brook, for a hundred, sir," shouts Tom, and he is right. With a splash that sends the water sparkling high in the air, the whole pack dash in, and are away on the other side racing in view.

"Surely she's not going to ride at that," men say to each other as Mrs. Talford catches her mare by the head.

But she is; and, with Sir John on the one side and the Parson on the other, she skims over like a bird. Old Tom's horse is done, and refuses, but being crammed at it again just gets over with a scramble. The rest ride at it in a body, some in, some over; some think better of it and turn back; but before any but the leading quartet are well over, Sir John's "who-whoop" rings out clear and loud, and tells them that they have again been beaten by "only a woman."

THE LADY WHO HUNTS AND DOES NOT RIDE.

If anyone could be found rash enough to hint to Mrs. Polson that in the hunting-field she was, to say the least of it, rather a bore than otherwise, the look of undisguised astonishment with which that individual's remarks would be met, ought, if he had any right feeling, to convince him that he was wrong; and that, if there was a woman in this world who was a useful addition to the Hunt, and who, wherever and whenever she thought proper to grace the scene, was always rapturously welcomed, that woman was Mrs. Polson, wife of Joseph

Polson, Esq., M.P., better known as The Right Hon. J. P.

Although as yet no one has dared to breathe a word to the lady herself, there are men, and a large number to boot, who, among themselves, vote her a nuisance; in fact they have been known to say that she is "One of the most infernal nuisances out. Always in the way. Never happy unless she is talking horse and hound, and for ever trying to catch some unfortunate novice 'just to give her a lead here, or to open a gate there;' while to answer her questions a man needs to be a walking glossary."

I am afraid there is a deal of truth in what these unappreciative men say, for Mrs. Polson before she was married had never got farther in the equestrian art than an occasional ride on a shaggy pony when staying with her aunt in Devonshire, or the *haute école* as practised up and down the King's Road at so much per hour when staying with her uncle at Brighton.

It was at the latter place that she met good-natured easy-going Joseph Polson ; and when her father, who was rector of a small parish in Dorset, heard that his Letty had said "Yes" to a rich man, there were great rejoicings at the parsonage, for she was one of seven, and the living being by no means a large one, Mr. Becket found some difficulty in making both ends meet.

However, no sooner had she married Polson and settled down in Bullshire as the Member's wife, than she must needs become a hunting-woman, and, as a hunting-woman and the Member's wife, give herself airs. Perhaps among her acquaintances there is no one that she hates with such a cordial hatred as poor unoffending Mrs. Talford, for although when she meets her the greeting (on her side at all events) is most effusive, still, deep down in her memory, rankles a speech that she once overheard Mrs. Talford make to her husband. She had come up rather late, just as the hounds were moving off, and the Colonel and his wife,

ignorant of her proximity, were discussing her powers of riding.

"My dear," said the Colonel, "I have not seen Mrs. Polson. Have you?"

"No," replied Mrs. Talford; "I don't suppose she is coming; it's rather a stiff country to-day;" and then, laughing, "how glad young Mr. Bevan will be. He said that she tacked herself on to him at Deanfield the other day, and after she had bored his life out for more than an hour, and made him open at least twenty gates, she asked him to come over some day and look at her hunters. It's a pity somebody can't tell her that men hate being bothered in the hunting-field."

Mrs. Polson's sudden appearance stopped further conversation on the subject. But from her over-affectionate manner ever since, Mrs. Talford knows perfectly well that the unlucky speech went farther than it was intended.

"Good morning, Tom. Got the dog-pack out to-day, I see, looking none the worse for

Saturday," says Mrs. Polson as she rides up, followed by a groom bearing at his back a large sandwich-case, and at his saddle-bow a holster-flask filled with sherry and water (for the Member's wife does not see the fun of hunting without her luncheon).

"Get away, good dog, get away; 'war hoss,'" to Bellman, who leaves the main body of the pack in order to make a closer inspection of Mrs. P. or the sandwich-case.

"Mornin', mum," replies old Tom, doffing his cap; and then to avoid further conversation he calls away Bellman and trots off to a distant point, bringing the hounds back at a walk to allow time for her to "collar someone else," as he puts it.

While he is away on his little tour we may just glance at the external appearance of the Member's wife. Certainly she is not a good riding figure, being of the order "dumpy," and her seat in the saddle reminds one strongly of a plum-pudding on a dish. Her habit is a close copy of Mrs. Talford's, with

the exception that it is much exaggerated. In the front of the collar, which is turned over, is displayed an elaborate necktie, with a fox's head painted on crystal as a pin, two heads of the same pattern serving as studs for her wristbands. She also affects the hunt-button, plain brass, with "B.H." in a monogram; and a hat-guard made of a small gold chain, secured to a most curly-brimmed hat by a fox's tooth, completes the dress; while the hunting-crop she carries in her fat little pudgy hand is more fitted for a First Whip than a lady, being both heavy and cumbersome.

Tom evidently knows her pretty well, for before he returns from his self-imposed trot to his original place, Mrs. Polson has "collared someone else," and is making herself agreeable (or trying to) to two strangers who are staying with the Master for a week, and whom she has met at dinner at Lappington. A small group standing a little way off, after bowing, smile among themselves and pity the inno-

cent strangers who, as young Bevan says, are "being let in for a day in waiting." "It's a shame of Lappington not to have put them on their guard," he continues; "I shall tell him so."

"She landed you once, Bevan, did not she?" asks another, laughing.

"Yes, but never again," is the reply. "Five-and-twenty gates to open, a treatise on scent, the pedigree of every hound in the pack, and some weak sherry-and-water, hardly compensate one for missing one of the best things of the season. By gad, we never saw hounds from the time they found till they killed, and yet to hear the woman talk, you would fancy she was in the first flight all the way. Look out, she is bearing down on us;" and the little group disperse, each one seemingly having caught sight of a man in the distance that he "must speak to for a moment."

Time's up now, and they move off to the big wood, Mrs. P. closely attended by the two

strangers, to whom she has promised to show the country. They feel obliged, or rather under an obligation to her, and do not like to leave her side, though both think they would rather see the country for themselves without a cicerone. It is her day all over, for it is even betting they do not get out of the wood; and even if they do, what so convenient as a false turn down a ride that leads to nowhere? By the time they get outside hounds will be well away, and the only chance of catching them will be through that line of gates that Mrs. Polson knows so well.

As they come up to the wood the trio find their progress barred by a low rail, over which Tom has popped, followed by a good many of the field. The two strangers naturally suppose that so great a sportswoman as Mrs. Polson will make nothing of a small obstacle like the one before them, so one politely gives her a lead over, turning round on the other side to say: "It's rather a boggy place on the

left, but if you jump well to the right you will find it quite firm," while the other holds back till the lady has successfully negotiated the fence.

They are a little surprised when she says, in the blandest possible tones: "I hope you will not think me a bore, but there is nothing I dislike so much as jumping in cold blood. It only takes it out of one's horse for nothing. If you would not mind taking that rail down —it drops off easily—I should be so much obliged."

This necessitates someone dismounting, and the man who gave the lead over has to get off and stand in a pool of muddy water, which he feels oozing through his boots, while he struggles manfully with the offending rail. At last his efforts are successful. Mrs. Polson gallops triumphantly through, splashing him all over as she passes.

"Oh, I am so sorry," she exclaims, when she sees what she has done. "It is my naughty horse; he can't bear to be kept waiting."

The splashed one is too polite to say much, but that does not prevent him from "thinking a lot;" and as he wipes the mud from his face he registers a vow to give my lady the slip on the first possible opportunity. This comes shortly, for a few minutes later there is an unmistakable find, and the hounds are seen tearing through the underwood to the right.

"This way—this way," pants Mrs. Polson, making the best of her road for a gate in an exactly opposite direction; "they are sure to turn to the left, and we shall be all right."

A view hollo on the right, followed by Tom's horn, decides the mud-bespattered gentleman, and he turns off, galloping down a ride which, as far as he can judge, leads to where he hears the hounds. He arrives just in time to see them top the bank, and when he finds himself well out of the wood, with some seven or eight men and one lady, who have got an equally good start, he congratulates himself on having escaped, and thinks

how his friend must be gnashing his teeth. Luck, however, favours Mrs. Polson, for the hounds swing round to the left, and she and her attendant squire ride through a hand-gate just as they go by. "There, I told you we should be all right," she says, highly gratified with herself, yet the while casting an anxious glance round the field for a gate which is nowhere visible.

"For'ard on; he's away over the plough, Tom," shouts Sir John as he gallops up; and they race him down towards a most uncompromising-looking stake and bound. Mrs. Talford is first over, and her husband follows close in her wake. The emancipated sportsman goes next, and barely saves a fall; then comes a farmer on a stout cob, who goes crash through the whole fabric, rolling himself far into the next field, while the cob reposes in the ditch. However he has made a most convenient gap, at which the Member's wife keeps a score or more impatient people waiting, while she, holding her steed tight

by the head, vainly endeavours to summon up sufficient courage to ride him over the place.

"Hang the woman; she's an impostor," mutters Stranger No. 2, now thoroughly exasperated, as he sees his friend sailing merrily away in the distance.

"Oh dear, I am afraid you must think me very tiresome," said Mrs. Polson to him; "I never knew my horse to refuse before; there must be something wrong with him. Please don't wait for me;" and, turning to her sandwich-bearer: "John, follow me down into the lane; I am afraid one of the horse's shoes are loose." Again, to her squire: "Please go on, I will catch you up again directly;" and she goes off to the road, where of course John finds the shoes, as he knew he would, perfectly tight. "Thank goodness for that," thinks her ex-equerry-in-waiting, making best haste to get to the hounds again; and as he manages to come up with them while Tom is making a cast, he tells his host the Master that he owes

him one for not putting him up to Mrs. P. and her riding powers.

Sir John laughs and says: "All right, old boy, you won't see her again till we have killed or lost and are going to draw for a fresh one. She will have finished her lunch by then; but I daresay there will be some sherry-and-water left for you as a reward."

Before his marriage the hon. Member for Bullshire was a most punctual man; but now, somehow, he always turns up late, and is seldom, if ever, seen at the meet, or till hounds are running, when he will suddenly appear riding as forward as ever. When asked by his friends the reason for this strange behaviour, he merely winks and looks over towards where his estimable spouse may be seen in the far distance pounding along through the gates, followed by the faithful John with the luncheon.

THE SCHOOLBOYS.

For the last week parents have been receiving letters from young hopeful, in which allusions have been make to the absolute necessity of sending by return of post some more pocket-money wherewith to liquidate sundry small accounts, and to enable him to give his friends who are "leaving this half" some presents.

Most of the documents have wound up with the announcement that there are only three or four days to the holidays, and with requests that John, or Thomas, or Sam may be told to get the pony fit for them to ride. In some instances the father, or, as the "young gentleman" prefers to call him, "the

governor," has been reminded of his promise to buy a new horse; and as he knows full well that unless he does so the word "peace," so far as he is concerned, may be scratched out of the dictionary, Jimmy Holden is called into council and the animal is procured.

As the down-train runs into Lappington Station, four or five eager faces may be seen, one over the other, filling up the window of the railway carriage; and before the train has well stopped four or five equally eager bodies jump out; and the porters, without waiting for instructions, immediately proceed to empty the compartment of rugs, sticks, two-shilling novels, bags, and the numerous other items which invariably accompany a boy on his return from school.

"There's the governor, Charlie," says a bright-looking lad to his schoolfellow, whom he has brought home with him for the first fortnight of the holidays.

"How are you, Dick? and how is the pony?" exclaims another, addressing the neat-

looking servant, who is evidently as pleased to see his young master as that worthy is to have put by his books for a time.

"No signs of frost; we shall be out to-morrow at The Grange," shouts a third, as he disappears within the portals of the booking-office.

The hero of the hour, however, is Harold Lappington, Sir John's youngest brother, a tall good-looking young fellow, who in the field is known to combine the fearlessness of youth with the knowledge of old age. He has come that morning from Eton, where he has been keeping his hand in by hunting the college beagles. Old Tom and his brother have come to meet him, and many of the other boys envy him the honour of shaking hands with so great a man as the Huntsman.

"By Guy, Mayster Harold, but you are growed, looking well and all," says Tom; and then, turning to the Master: "Eh, Sir John, ay's gettin' a rare-topped 'un."

"By Jove, Tom, there's no need to ask

how you are, you're looking as fit as a fiddle. Is that young gray horse fit for me to ride? The one you had at the kennels, I mean," ejaculates Harold; and, receiving an answer in the affirmative, walks off with Sir John to where an obsequious porter is hoisting his traps into a dog-cart which is standing outside.

"Here, John," he says to his brother, as he jumps up, "I'm going to drive."

"Not if I know it," replies the Master. "I have not forgotten that last exploit of yours, when you upset me over a heap of stones."

But of course the boy has his way, and with a "Good-night, Tom," and a wave of the hand, they rattle round the corner, shaving the gate-post so close as to cause the Master to clench his teeth and hold on like grim death.

"Well," mutters Tom, when they are out of sight, "there'll be some riding to-morrow, I know, and some tumbling too. I 'opes we gets away quick, for though I loves to see the

lads go, they do myther (bother) me terrible at the first;" and he turns up the road towards the kennels, exchanging Good-nights and bright hopes for the morrow with the young occupants of the various traps as they pass him on their way to their respective homes.

By ten o'clock the next morning the road to The Grange is lively with the usual symptoms of a meet. Grooms with led-horses are riding alongside the tax-cart of the butcher or baker. Men and boys on foot keep up that peculiar kind of shuffle, half run, half walk, which is seen nowhere save in the country. The keeper and the poacher jostle one another and combine to chaff the merry vendor of crockery and hardware who, perched on the top of his wares and drawn by his trotting "moke," has chosen the centre of the road, somewhat to the inconvenience of those in his rear.

He is well able to hold his own, and gives as much as he gets. Indeed, in the matter of

chaff, it takes the allied forces all their time to keep on even terms until they overtake the local policeman, when the channel of wit and repartee is diverted against "poor Robert," who of course being ignominiously defeated at once, takes refuge under official dignity, and thinks of the time when his turn will come.

The keepers have held aloof from the latter entertainment, for it would not be right to make a butt of the Law, they think; and so, joining him, all proceed towards The Grange as merry as crickets. Presently there is a shout from behind, and turning round they see old Tom and the pack, with many a bit of pink in his wake, and, what is more (in their own eyes, at all events), many an emancipated schoolboy.

"Lend us one of them dorgs to run under my carriage," says the itinerant hardware merchant as they pass him.

Tom rather winces at the word "dorgs" being applied to his darlings, and is preparing

a stinging rejoinder; but before it is ready, Eton, Harrow, Rugby, and Winchester have (verbally) fallen on the rash jester and silenced him completely.

However, he manages to make his way to The Grange, and while there disposes of some of his crockery, and drinks Tom's health in some of Mr. Boulter's beer, calling him, by-the-way, "Lord Topboots."

Such greetings and chaff, too, among lads! Criticisms of their respective animals, mutual challenges, and hurried arrangements for all sorts of sport. The Secretary is not forgotten either, and various inquiries are made concerning "his last speech and what time he came home." At last the Master and his brother Harold drive up, and in a few moments are mounted and ready. One glass of sherry "Just to keep the Secretary in tune," as Harold says, and Tom, getting a nod, trots off to the wood about half a mile away.

"Charles," says he to the First Whip, "you get down to corner, and if so be as t' fox breaks,

dunna hollo; just crack yer whip when ay's well away. Maybe then I shall have a chance of getting hounds on to the line."

On the road to the wood there are two small fences, and though the gates are open wide, with the exception of Harold Lappington, every boy has his pony over, into, or through them. A fall or two brings down a torrent of jeers on the unfortunates, and one youngster in particular, who goes careering round the field, half on, half off his animal, is most productive of sport.

"Stick to him, Johnny," shout some; "he's off; no he isn't; well saved," as, more by good luck than good management, he regains his seat, and comes back looking rather crestfallen. Some of the farmers think for a moment of their fences and what a lot of "making up" there will be on the morrow; but the joyous faces and boisterous spirits of the schoolboys are infectious, and they feel with old Simms, who said, when last year they broke three of his gates down and let

his sheep out all over the country: "We were all boys once, and not a bit better. Bless 'em, they don't mean any harm, and I love 'em."

The first draw is a blank, much to the disappointment of all, Boulter in particular, for he catches it most unmercifully from all his young friends.

A move is then made for a piece of rough stuff called Shepherd's Gorse. Sir John has a difficult task to keep his field in order here, for it is a crooked in-and-out-shaped place, and the ponies will creep forward into forbidden corners. As fast as he orders one back he finds another expectant and over-anxious youth somewhere else.

However, they are not kept long in suspense, for a quick find is followed by a ringing "Gone away," and his field gallop round to find Tom and the pack sailing along merrily, he having slipped off with the hounds well on to the line before he vouchsafed to proclaim his departure.

Hard work it is to catch them, for they are racing with a scent breast-high, but the schoolboys sit down and send their ponies along with a will, thinking no more of the big bank and ditch that confront them than they would if it was only a broken sheep-hurdle. Harold Lappington is first down to it, and his young gray pecks badly on the far side, for the animal is a bit fresh and over-jumps himself. Harold's fine seat, however, saves him from a fall, and turning round to where he sees young Charlie Whistler riding his pony, scarce thirteen hands three inches in height, at the biggest place he can find, he shouts: "Steady, Charlie; it's too big for you; take it in two, on and off."

"Go on," replies the monkey, "I'm all——" he would have said "right," but as he was turning head over heels like a rabbit before he could finish his sentence, he found further conversation somewhat difficult. Next in order came two hard-riding members with Sir John and Mrs. Talford, and then a

whole crowd of horses and ponies, a good many of which plumbed the depths of the ditch on the landing-side. It is wonderful what a good pony will do with a resolute youngster on his back. Where it can't jump it will creep or climb, and generally manages to pull through somehow or other; but this particular fence is a rasper to commence with, and in most cases the cause of grief is over-excitement.

"You're a nice sort of fellow, Tom, slipping off like that," says Harold, as he comes up with the old Huntsman, who is gnashing his teeth because they've checked, and "Them blessed lads will be all among t' hounds again."

"What did you do it for?" he continues.

"Ah Mayster Harold; must get a start, or we should never get through all them ponies," replies Tom. "Here they come, by gad. That's it, praise the Lord," as the hounds hit it off just as the rest arrive.

"For'ard on," yell the lads, as pleased as Punch to have caught the hounds again.

"Harold, it's my idea the fox will make over the Swill," says Sir John to his brother, as they gallop along the grass. "There are two or three deuced stiff ploughs before we get there, and as you can't jump it we had better take the road and round by the bridge."

"Not I; I'm going with the hounds," replies Harold. "If they go over I can but go in and out."

"Don't you be a fool," retorts the Master. "By Jove, I'm right! it is for the Swill," as the hounds swung to the left towards the line of pollards that denote the course of that "meandering streamlet."

"Hold hard, young gentlemen, hold hard," roars Tom, as they hang for a moment on the plough, and five or six reeking ponies get unpleasantly near his darlings. "You canna jump Swill; you must go round by t' bridge."

But they pay no heed to either him or paternal warning, and pound away over the plough towards the willows.

"Here, I'm dashed if some on 'em won't get drownded, for they'll have it, as sure as my name's Wilding," he continues.

The two Simms and a few adventurous spirits follow in the wake of the lads, while the rest of the field follow the Master to the bridge. As the hounds plunge in Tom gallops off for the same goal, saying: "This way, young gents, this way." He might as well have spared his breath, for Eton is not going to be beaten by Harrow, nor Winchester by Rugby, nor Clifton by any of them, and the rivals feel the honour of their schools to be at stake. Harold again heads the charge, and the young 'un makes a gallant effort, just getting his fore-legs on the opposite bank. Quick as thought the boy is over his head on *terra firma*, while the gray falls back into the brook. "Bravo," shout the rest of the field, "bravo!" and, as his horse scrambles out, Harold's heart swells with pride, and he says to his brother: "The dear old school bested them all."

Harrow, Rugby, Winchester, and Clifton, all go at it in a lump, and all four are splashing about together, when little Phillips, a lad of twelve, who has just completed his first half at Marlborough, comes down, and handling his rat of a pony down the bank, the pair swim across, and out the other side they scramble, the urchin shouting at the top of his voice : " Hooray, Eton first, Marlborough second."

All, happily, manage, contrary to Tom's expectations, to escape being " drownded ;" and, wet as they are, ride harder than ever to make up their " leeway."

About a mile farther on the fox is viewed heading straight for Braby Main Earths, where he goes to ground with the pack close at his brush. Then paternal authority asserts itself, and the dripping schoolboys are promptly ordered home. They plead hard to stay, but paterfamilias is firm, and the lads turn to go with a last wistful look at Tom and the hounds.

It is late in the afternoon, and they have had a right down good gallop, thinks Sir John ; so turning to the field he says : "Gentlemen, I shall send the hounds home. We will call this the schoolboys' day, and I am sure after the way they have ridden it would be a shame to go on without them."

THE BOASTER.

If one could only believe one quarter of the strange adventures, hairbreadth escapes, and marvellous performances in the field of which Mr. Story says he has been the hero, one might well set him down as a wonderful Nimrod. But, unfortunately, veracity does not form part of his character. He is good-natured, generous, hospitable, and amusing, yet one of the most confirmed liars in the country.

Not that he is what is known as a harmful liar, for he would as soon think of telling an anecdote reflecting on the character of any of his friends or acquaintances as he would of

picking their pockets. No, his embroidery is strictly personal. It appertains solely to what he has done or can do, and such a habit has this become with him that he firmly believes every word he says, and will pledge his honour that such and such a thing happened, that he did this or that, the while relating some performance that effectually puts that prince of fibbers Baron Munchausen in the background.

Nothing seems to cure him. Over and over again has he been caught out by a sceptical audience, who have then and there endeavoured to put him to the blush, but it has been of no avail, for two minutes afterwards he will be romancing away as gaily as ever on some fresh subject. Men have got tired of trying to break him of it, and now only sit and laugh, acknowledging that "Old Story is devilish good fun though he is such a thundering liar."

Of course in the hunting-field he is the veriest impostor that ever got on a horse,

never, if he can possibly help it, leaving the glorious safety of the hard highway. Yet the description of the run as told by him in the evening fairly takes your breath away, and, supposing you to be a stranger, makes you feel that you have come into a country the like of which you have never seen.

Sheep-hurdles are (according to Mr. Story) five-barred gates, the smallest ditch a veritable river; and as he turns to some one or the other guest at his table and says: "Did you notice that horse I was riding to-day? Deuced clever animal, I can tell you. Jumped a double post and rails with about twelve foot of water on the far side, and made nothing of them, 'pon my honour!" you wonder whether there are many fences of the same species to be encountered, or many horses with the same supreme contempt for them to be picked up in Bullshire.

Once in his life he did jump a brook, and it is even betting that before you have

been long in his presence he will tell you all about it, though his version of the occurrence differs slightly from that of those who saw it.

They had been having a very slow hunting-run on a cold scent, barely out of a trot most of the time, the hounds picking it out inch by inch, and at last they came to a dead lock in a field, round two-thirds of which ran the Marston brook. Mr. Story, who had been as usual very prominent in the centre of the road, which ran conveniently adjacent, thought he might as well turn into the field through the gate, which he did.

Unfortunately for him there was a bull in the corner, which neither he nor anyone else had noticed, and just as the gate swung to and latched again, the hounds hit off the line and went over the brook. At the same moment the bull, having lashed himself into a rage, and maddened by the cry of the hounds, singled out Story's red coat and charged down on him. This

startled his gallant steed. Away he went, followed by the bull, and, to everyone's intense astonishment and amusement, Story was seen on his horse's neck well over the water.

He himself will tell you that he cut the whole field down — "Pounded them, sir, on my honour, at the brook;" but the real facts of the case are those I have just narrated.

Most particular is Mr. Story as to his external appearance, and the bows of his well-fitting leathers are tied with a mathematical accuracy attainable only by long and patient manipulation, aided by the use of various scientific instruments, such as pincers and button-hooks, of which he keeps a large assortment. His necktie is the envy of half the men in the field, while the peculiar shade of his tops has caused more envy, hatred, and malice among the valets than one would have believed possible.

It is very fine to hear the contemptuous

tone he assumes when dilating on the performances of those sportsmen who come under the head of the "galloping-and-jumping division." "Look at them," he will say. "I ask you, what do they know about hunting? They've only one idea—jump, jump, jump, all day. Now no one is fonder of a quick thing than I am, but you never see me galloping about, jumping over everything I can find" (the only true thing in his speech), "and yet when it comes to riding, I flatter myself I can give them a stone and a beating. Valpy! Faugh, a rough-rider, sir, a rough-rider. Nowhere in a run. Have beaten him over and over again, 'pon my honour. You remember that forty minutes we had," etc. etc.; and then follows a glowing description of some imaginary run over the stiffest part of the country, where Story had the hounds all to himself after the first ten minutes, and never saw a soul again till they had broken up their fox.

If he happens to be at his own house he will take you off to his den, and, by way of corroborating the tale, will point out the brush of the identical fox hanging over the mantelpiece, and handling it carefully, will say: "Ah, there is some satisfaction in having a brush that one gets all by one's self."

(Quite so, Mr. Story; but what was that small piece of gold for, that found its way out of your pocket into that of Charles the First Whip?)

Quite a museum of sport is Story's den, or "sanctum," as he calls it. Round the walls are hung innumerable sporting pictures, foxs' brushes and masks, all mounted, and bearing the date, length of run, find, and kill, emblazoned in gold letters underneath. On the left-hand side of the fireplace is a gun-cupboard, well stocked with breech-loaders and rifles; for Story has some wonderful adventures in the Rocky Mountains to relate. Opposite, on the other

side, is a stick-rack, crowded with crops, cutting-whips, ash-plants, spurs of all sizes, and hunting-caps; while underneath are arranged a pile of white band-boxes, each containing a shining Lincoln and Bennett. Between the windows are a row of hat-pegs, four in number, and on every peg hangs a hat reduced to the state of flatness said to be peculiar to pancakes.

Naturally one is struck with so novel an arrangement in dilapidated head-gear, and in a weak moment, perhaps, one asks "What on earth those old hats are for? Are they used in the summer to keep the birds from the peas, or what?"

"Peas, my dear fellow; no, by gad," will be the ready reply. "They are the hats I have come to grief in. I keep them for old lang syne. In that one on the right I rode the famous Willowfield run. Fourteen falls, and finished up in the Swill. On my honour, I thought I never should have got out. Horse got on the top of

me, and I was under water for a minute;" and then, taking down the other three in succession, Story will relate the romance attached to each.

Ill-natured slander says that their present shape is attributable to having been violently sat upon in the garden after two days' rain, and the authority of a discharged valet, who remonstrated on this wholesale destruction of his perquisites, is given. But then there is nothing that ill-natured slander will not say.

One good point about the Boaster is that he is a most stanch preserver of foxes, and although his property is not a large one, Lappington is always perfectly certain of finding in his coverts. It is a great day for him when the hounds meet in the village. No general commanding a division feels half such a great man as Mr. Story, who, having confidentially informed Sir John that there are no less than five foxes in the wood, takes charge

of Tom and the pack and leads them on to victory.

Should they not find immediately, the various stages of anxiety depicted on his face are intensely amusing, and the triumphant "I-told-you-so" expression he assumes when at last the swelling chorus proclaims the varmint at home, is well worth coming any distance to see.

No sooner are they well away than the highroad claims him for its own, and, followed by a small detachment, Story's figure is seen vanishing through the toll-gate, making for some distant point which he seems to know by intuition the fox is bound for. His knowledge of the country and the lanes thereof is wonderful, and having, by slipping down a byway, shaken off his retinue, he arrives on the high ground just as the fox crosses the bottom and crawls into Watson's osiers.

The hounds are not yet in sight though he can hear them in the distance, so he has

time to let himself into the field through the gate, and inspect the low wattle fence at the far end, over which he knows the line will be. Finding it is very plain sailing, and that there is a most convenient gap again into the lane which leads direct to the osiers, he gets behind a haystack, and waits the arrival of Tom and the pack. Most men would hollo the fox, but Story knows a trick worth two of that. He has a reputation to keep up, and a history to tell of "those big rails by Brown's farm," and "that double after we came out of the water-meadows," which would hardly sound so well if he was known to have arrived at his present position in front of the hounds.

Presently the hounds come up, and he notes with glee that there are but four or five anywhere near them. As they top the wattle he dashes round the haystack as if he had ridden all the way wide on their left, and flying the fence is in the same field with them—alone.

"Dang 'im, how did ay get theer? Ay never rode along wi' us, I know," mutters Tom to himself; but the pace is too hot to think about it at the moment.

"Capital run, Tom," shouts Story, as they gallop down the field together; "but, my eye, what a stiff bit we have had! Those rails of Brown's were a stopper. You should have had them where I did, on the left." (Tom had been deuced nearly down there, a circumstance Story had noticed from the road.) "He'll be in the osiers; I'll get on and view him out the far side;" and away goes our friend through the gap and down the lane.

"Now, I should just like to know wheer in the name of fortun' ay's coom from. There's some hanky-panky, I knows. Did you see Mayster Story, Charles?" says Tom, as they check, to the First Whip, who has just arrived, his coat showing pretty evident signs of where he had been.

"Saw him going down the road when we

found; but Craftsman has it," replies Charles, and "For'ard on" is again the order.

Into the osiers they crash, and a "Tally-ho!" from Story on the far side shows them to be close behind their fox. "For'ard, for'ard, for'ard away," screams Tom, blowing the hounds out of the covert; and in the second field it is all up, and Tom is off his horse in the middle of the pack, with Story and five others only there to see. As the remainder of the field gallop up by twos and threes our friend takes his watch out, and, addressing the Master, says: "Best thing I've seen for many a day—fifty-three minutes with hardly a check. 'Pon my honour, it's marvellous that so few of us came to grief. Awful stiff country. Give you my word, I thought I should break my neck every fence."

"Could not afford to lose such a sportsman as you, Story," replies Sir John, laughing and turning to Tom. "Here, give Mr. Story the brush; it's worthy of a place in his den."

"Right, sir," says Tom; but he winks at Charles and whispers: "There'll be a fine tale over this one, I'll lay."

Story is dining out that night, so he does not accompany them to find their second fox, but by the time the ladies have come into the drawing-room and the chairs are drawn round the fire, the fifty-three minutes have grown to an hour and twenty minutes, and the deeds of daring performed by himself have increased in proportion. As he drives home he turns it over in his own mind whether another hat and peg shall not be added to the relics between the window, with the glorious history of "the crumpler over Brown's rails" attached thereto. But he eventually decides, as so many of the field saw him at the finish with his headpiece in its normal condition, that perhaps on the whole it would be better not.

This, however, does not prevent him from entering a full and true (?) account of the run to Watson's osiers in his hunting-diary, and

executing a small yet carefully-drawn map of the country, with crosses marked thereon denoting the locality of some of the terrific obstacles he encountered—and negotiated in safety.

Should the conversation turn on hunting (which it is pretty certain to do) while smoking the post-prandial cigar in Story's sanctum, he will read a few extracts from this diary, which the assembled guests may believe or not—as they like.

HODGE.

"WHICH is the way to Langley, my good man?" asks Mr. Tyrol of a countryman he overtakes on his way to the meet. Mr. Tyrol, who is a stranger to the Bullshire, and has come down just to look at the country and see what it is like with a view to future operations, as yet does not know his way about, so is glad of any information he can obtain as to the most direct route.

"Yew mun tak furst turnin to right till yer com' to smithy, then keep straight on past Jack Spender's down t' green lane, but mind yer dunna mistake t' road past ould Betty Wilson's cottage, and then you're sure

to be right," replies the man, with a glance at his interlocutor.

"Thanks," says Mr. Tyrol, not much the wiser. "Let me see. I've got to go down to the green lane, and then past Mrs. Wilson's cottage; but how am I to know which is the right cottage—and how far it is?"

"Oh, any chap 'ull tell yer ould Betty's place; it's better nor six mile if yer go one way and under four if yer tak t' other."

"And which is the short way?" is Mr. T.'s next question.

"Well," replies his director, "yew mun go as I've tould yer, till yer come t' lane, then turn into field past the works. Yer know the works maybe?" and on Mr. Tyrol confessing his ignorance, after a pause: "Ah, that maks a 'nation difference, doan't it?"

The fact is not for a moment to be disputed, and Mr. Tyrol is in despair, when suddenly a bright idea strikes Hodge, and he looks up, saying: "Perhaps you're a-going fox-'unting?"

As it is not customary for people to ride

about in pink, save in civic processions, unless they are "on sport intent," it becomes hardly necessary to answer, and Mr. T. wonders what Hodge could possibly have thought he was going to do.

"If so be," however, continues the pedestrian, "I'm a-going t' meet mysen, and I can show yer t' road. Can that 'oss jump? Acos we've got to go through Farmer Danby's meaders, and 'e most allus locks his gates."

Notwithstanding the chance of a locked gate and a nasty fence in cold blood, Mr. Tyrol thinks it an opportunity not to be lost, and gladly avails himself of the proffered guidance, while Hodge sees a prospective shilling in the horizon, which, with great accuracy, he divides as he tramps along into "three pots o' four."

"And what sort of a country is Langley?" asks the directee of his guide and director, after about a quarter of a mile passed in silence.

"Foine country for turnips," is the reply. "I mind when Mr. Arles—you knows him I'll be bound? Not know Mr. Arles! Why I

thought everyone know'd him, he's the biggest man about these parts; he was the Dook's agent. Well, I mind when he got better nor——"

Here Mr. Tyrol thinks it advisable to check the flow of Hodge's conversation, as he sees plainly that unless he does so he will be in for an agricultural dissertation on the producing power per acre of Mr. Arles' land, so he cuts him short with "I don't mean that; I mean what sort of a country is it to ride over? Stiff big fences, or what?"

"Some big, some littel; but there's allus a road as you can git along if so be as you don't care about leping; and there's any amount o' foxes—swarms on 'em. Why, it was only last week as ould Jim tould me as Bill Upton 'ad tould him as he see'd two when he wor working in Squire Beale's plantation. But there's Langley, sir. Thank ye kindly." And Hodge, the richer by a shilling, stops at the wayside public-house to drink the stranger's health.

Happy in having arrived at his destination, and much instructed and amused by what he had heard, Mr. Tyrol rides on to where old Tom and the hounds are visible, and is soon lost to sight in the crowd of horses and men at the meet. By the time he has done contemplating the hounds, Hodge has finished his libation, and, in company with a "mate," comes on the scene of action.

"Mornin', mayster," says he to old Tom; "whear be you a-going furst?" and on hearing that Collingly Wood will be the first draw, he turns to his companion and says: "By Guy, mate, we mun look slippy or we shanna be there in time."

It is not every day in the week that these "horny-handed sons of toil" get an outing, and they do not mean to lose their chance of seeing the fun if they can help it. So away they go, followed by three or four boys, towards the big wood seen in the distance. They have not gone far before they discover that they have followers,

and knowing well that with these in their wake it will be impossible to secrete themselves in an advantageous position, they turn round and deliver a few home-truths, which, though not particularly elegant, answer the purpose, and have the desired effect of getting rid of the boys. This done, they continue their route till they arrive at the hunting-gate leading into the covert.

"Now I wonder which end t' ould mon will begin at?" asks the elder of his companion.

"I dunna knoa," replies Number Two, putting his finger into his mouth and holding it up; "but from the way o' the wind I should say as 'e'll start down here; bound to go up-wind."

No fool in matters of sport is Hodge, and, chawbacon as you may call him, you would find it hard to puzzle him on the subject of the "run of a fox," always provided he understood your questions. Old Tom knows his value well, and over and

over again have things been put straight by the far-seeing blue eye; and "'E's gone yonder by th' ould barn," or "I'v seed 'im cross o'er bottom," has enabled the Huntsman to hit off the line without wasting the precious moments in a long and speculative cast.

The two "mates" have barely ensconced themselves comfortably on the top of a stack of "cordwood," from whence they can command more than half the wood, when the pack arrive, and the horsemen, as they file through the gateway, are subjected to a running fire of criticism. Woe betide the man whose animal obstinately refuses some small fence within sight of Hodge and Co. Although the rider will not hear the speech, the loud laugh from one or the other tells him plainly enough that he is the cause of their merriment, and he wishes himself — or them — farther away. As soon as the hounds are thrown in the occupants of the cordwood stack become excited, and the younger of them,

our friend of the road, suggests an adjournment to a tree where he thinks a better view can be obtained.

"Stop where yer be, Jim," says the elder; "yer canna do better, and if yer gets messing about now you'll only have t' Master and old Tom atop o' yer back." So Jim is persuaded, and remains quiet. Presently a yellow body is seen stealing through the underwood, and the chorus of music shows that the hounds are aware of Mr. Reynard's presence.

"There 'e goes," whispers Jim, "and here they come. By Guy, the're away," as the hounds dash through the covert, and a loud "Tally-ho" is heard on the other side. To slip down is the work of an instant, and both Jim and his companion are making the best of their way to the corner where the fox has broken. Here they find a regular crush; the hunting-gate is locked or jammed, and no one can get out. Threading their way through the horses, however, with the

help of a good heave, a strong heave, and a heave both together, the pair manage to have the gate off its hinges, and the impatient field rush through, nearly overturning Jim in their mad career.

"Oh, go on, go on," says that worthy, as he jumps out of the way; "some on yer won't go much farther than the first fence at that pace."

And he is right.

There are two or three loose horses running about, one of which he manages to catch and restore to the owner, receiving in return a small acknowledgment, which — having submitted to the universal test, his teeth—he slips into the pocket of his brown corduroys.

The next field is a stiffish plough, and by the time he is halfway across Hodge is done, and he finds his heavy boots none the lighter for three or four inches of wet clay adhering to the soles. However, the sight of a friendly hayrick in the distance

consoles him, and to his great delight he sees a ladder is reared against it and a man at work cutting out some trusses.

"Can yer see ought on 'em, ould man?" he pants, as he reaches the foot of the ladder, and the "ould man" from his coign of vantage, shouts back: "Nip up, lad, nip up, the're a-going like billy o'." Jim is quickly alongside, his face beaming with excitement as he sees the whole panorama of the chase stretched out before him. As he watches, he notices his friend of the morning—Mr. Tyrol—and points him out to the man on the rick. Luck favouring the spectators, the hounds suddenly swing sharp round and cross close beneath and within hearing. There is a nasty fence over which the line lies, and a goodish few turn away for the gate, but Mr. Tyrol heads straight for it with the rest of the hard-riders.

"Well done, sir; well done!" roars Hodge from the rick, and Mr. T., recognising him, gives him a nod as he rides at the fence.

His horse, however, jumps short, and the result is a rattling fall.

"Laws, that's a buster," says Jim; "I mun go and help him, he gied me a bob;" showing by his words the triumph of filthy lucre over Christian charity. Not that he would not have been just as ready to pick up anyone without the shilling, but the gift had made a profound impression, and the thought that was uppermost found vent in words.

By the time he reaches the spot Mr. Tyrol has picked himself up, and, catching his horse, is away; and Hodge returns to the rick to see the last he can of the receding chase.

As he trudges homewards he hears various accounts of how "the hounds are been by," etc., and lighting his pipe he makes his way towards his own particular inn where he usually takes his glass.

He is going along leisurely over the fields when he hears a loud voice behind him, and

turning round, finds himself face to face with two men on horseback, one of whom is ordering him to "Open that gate there, do you hear?" Hodge knows in a moment that he is not a Bullshire man; and what is more, he recognises in an equally short space that he is not a gentleman for all his pink coat and fine feathers, and his native pride rebels; so he takes no notice, but turns round and continues his journey, and getting over the stile with a laugh, he mutters to himself: "'E's got some cheek an' all, d——n him; I shanna open gate unless 'e's a bit more civil."

"Here, you fellah, do you hear—open this gate, will you?" shouts the angry *parvenu* again, and then commences a course of good solid abuse.

This is more than even Hodge can stand, so he slowly faces round again and says: "Jump o'er it or get off and open it yerself. I ain't paid ter go about t' country helping the likes o' you home."

When he tells the story in the public-house, as tell it he will, after recounting all he saw of the chase and a bit more besides, he will say: "I knowed he wanna out of Bullshire. None of our gents are like that; sum City chap maybe, 'ain't larned manners;" and while spending the rest of the eighteen-pence he has earned out hunting he is as happy as a king, with whom he would not change places for the world, much preferring, so long as he can get occasionally a day off and plenty to eat and drink, to remain as simple—Hodge.

THE KEEPER.

One of the richest men in the county of Bullshire next to "the Dook" is a Mr. Betteridge, a retired partner of the well-known firm of Betteridge, Woolsey, and Co., of Manchester, who about five years back purchased the Medemere estate, which originally belonged to the Slowboy family. Of course he immediately improved (?) the fine old Elizabethan hall by adding thereto sundry wings and towers, and also converting the old-fashioned gardens, with their quaint yew-edges, into trim parterres and terraces, after what he was pleased to call "the Italian style."

He has two great objects in life, in both of which unfortunately he appears bound to be frustrated. The first is to be what is known as "a popular sportsman," and the second to be considered somebody of importance.

With regard to number one—beyond having made a gorse and keeping the most expensive cattle, which, needless to say, he cannot ride himself—his ideas are limited; while, in the second instance, he has a deadly rival, before whom he sinks into insignificance, and whose word he has learnt to look on as law.

This individual is neither more nor less than his Head-keeper, "Mr. James," who (in his own estimation) combines all the virtues under the sun, and speaks in the most grandiloquent way of "our shooting," "our woods," "our coverts," "our foxes," "our parties," and "our" Heaven knows what. Mr. James will inform you that he is a most ardent fox-hunter, that it is "our pride always to have

foxes for Sir John. In fact, I told Mr. Betteridge that it must be when we first agreed on the shooting," etc.

Yet, strange to say, there is a scarcity of the commodity in the Medemere Woods that does not tally with these high-sounding assertions. Certainly the gorse generally contains one or two, but that is quite on the outsides, and near nothing in the pheasant interest. Betteridge himself would pay anything, do anything (except adopt the only proper method), to have foxes, and has many a time and oft remonstrated with "Mr. James" on the subject. But he is invariably snubbed and subdued by this mighty potentate, and made to wish he had not spoken.

It is unfortunate that "Mr. James" should have lived, before he condescended to "assist" Mr. Betteridge, with the Earl of Upcroft, for the "Hearl" is his great rallying-point; and whenever there is anything that his present employer does not quite like, and ventures to suggest alterations upon, it is always :

"When I lived with the 'Hearl' we never did in no way different to what we are a-doing now, and the 'Hearl,' he used to say as how, thanks to me—'I puts it all down to you, James,' was his very words—'heverything works just like clockwork.' Of course if so be as you wants it different, why it can be done, but depend hon it the 'Hearl' knowed what was what."

After this "Cottonopolis" has nothing to say, and James and the "Hearl" carry it.

Give him his due as a Keeper, he is excellent; for getting up a head of game his equal is not to be found, nor can his method of beating the covers or showing his birds be surpassed. But in his heart, notwithstanding his outward professions, he is a vulpecide, and his satellites are too well trained and hold him in too much awe to say anything.

Sir John Lappington distrusts him; indeed, he has gone so far as to speak to Betteridge on the subject, and old Tom is perfectly convinced on the point; but James and his

"Hearl" have hitherto been more than they can manage.

Last season things very nearly came to a climax, for after drawing Mr. Betteridge's coverts blank three times running, Sir John vowed he would not come there again. Mr. James was most profuse in his apologies, and his astonishment was grand.

"I'm sure," said he, "I can't imagine where them foxes has got to. Bill saw two in the big wood last night, and I've been most pertickerler about it. Bill tells me as he knows of another in the Cross Spinney. Didn't yer, Bill? Where's Bill?" (That worthy having carefully slipped out of sight on the first signs of a cross-examination.) "Ah! 'e's never here when he's wanted," continued the great man. "Tom, I'm thinking you must have drawed over 'em."

"More than I'm thinking you've done," returned old Tom; adding, *sotto voce*, "nasty deceitful beggar."

"Well, Mr. Betteridge," said Sir John

after a pause, and with his eye fixed on "Mr. James," "it's a great pity, but I think I must be to blame to a certain extent. I ought to have brought out some different hounds. I must get some truffle-dogs if I come here again. It seems our only chance of finding foxes, and I daresay your Keeper is right and we have drawn over them."

The shouts of laughter that followed this speech made it clear to both master and man that there was some sarcasm, but neither of them could make out quite what it was—until the evening, when Mr. James, happening to meet the village schoolmaster, asked him what Sir John meant by truffle-dogs, and was informed that they were a peculiar breed that found things underground.

The joke went round the village in a trice, and Mr. James is still known as "Truffles," though it is not quite safe to call him so to his face.

For more than half the season the Master kept his word, and the hounds never came

near Medemere. But at last a piteous appeal from Mr. Betteridge is listened to, and "Monday, Medemere Hall," appears in the paper.

Such a turn-out! A breakfast, more than half of it down from Gunter's; powdered footmen rushing about in everybody's way; footmen out of powder doing the same thing; a butler, whose busy appearance is worth a hundred a-year to him, superintending the champagne, which flowed freely; and over all Mr. Betteridge, flushed, excited, and uncomfortable.

Outside is the same profusion, and Mr. James and his army of retainers dispense good cheer with a liberal hand. No fear has he to-day, for Bill has actual and *bonâ-fide* knowledge of a fox in the osiers, and to make quite certain, a small box from Leadenhall Market came down two days before, and the contents have been shaken out in the big wood.

Under the circumstances he can afford to

pass by Tom's remark of "Hope you haven't stopped no foxes in to-day" in silence, merely saying: "I think we had better draw our Osiers first, if Sir John is agreeable. I have told Mr. Betteridge that would be the first draw."

"Oh, you have, have yer?—that was kind of you," says Tom; and turning to the Whip: "Charles, put those hounds to me; they might go and injure Mr. James's flower-beds."

What the result of this speech, which of course raised a laugh, might have been it is hard to say, for at this moment out comes the Master and Mr. Betteridge, followed by the rest of the field. Mr. James takes off his hat with a low bow, and says: "Beg pardon, Sir John, I was a just saying to the Huntsman that we'd better try the Hosiers first. Bill knows of a fox there."

"I hope he does this time, James," replies Sir John; but I am going to draw the big wood, and then the Osiers."

"Very good, Sir John; of course you

knows best," remarks Mr. James, and then hurries off, thinking how deuced lucky it is that he had a bagman down on the chance.

When they arrive at the bottom of the wood they find the great man standing at the gate full of importance, and with an air of self-satisfaction on his face. "I'm sure there's summut up, sir," says old Tom to Sir John, as the hounds dash into cover. "He'd never look so 'nation pleased if there was not some roguery in the wind. Eleu, in; eleu, at him; eugh, boys. Bagman, maybe. Eleu, try." A tally-ho from the far side before the hounds have opened on the line cuts him short, and with a "Danged if I don't think I'm right," the old Huntsman, blowing his horn, gallops down the ride to where the hollo was heard. The hounds do not settle on the line kindly, in fact, the old hounds will scarcely own it; however, they get along somehow for about a quarter of an hour, when poor bagman's race is run and they pull him down.

"Who-whoop," yells Tom; "who-whoop,

and if that don't make yer ashamed of yourself nothin' will; I know'd he were a bagman —dang the cheek of the man."

Not a hound will touch him, not even the young entry, and Sir John is perfectly furious.

"Mr. Betteridge," he says, as that worthy appears, quite innocent and highly delighted at there being a fox at all. "Mr. Betteridge, I came here at your request to draw your covers; I came here on your assurance that there were foxes; and you, sir, have the audacity to turn out a stinking bagman in front of my hounds."

"My dear Sir John," replied the unfortunate man, "I never should dream of doing such a thing; my Keeper told me there were foxes; but I never would have turned out a bagman, I assure you. How can you tell it is a bag fox?"

"I believe, Mr. Betteridge, you are innocent, and I apologise," says Sir John after a pause. "You ask me how I know. Look

there at the hounds, they know well enough. Frankly, I tell you that unless you arrange matters with your Keeper James, who is the author of this, I will not draw your covers again, nor will I take your subscription to the hounds;" and then, turning to Tom, "try the Osiers, and if that's blank, trot off to Lappington."

Mr. Betteridge is quite flabbergasted, and in the first flush of the thing vows vengeance against the Keeper, but this cools down considerably before they get to the osiers, and he begins to turn over in his mind what the "Hearl" would have done. Mr. James is ignorant of the little scene that has been enacted, so meets the hounds at the Osiers, and, touching his hat to Sir John, with a smile says: "Killed him, sir? You'll find another here."

He is somewhat astonished, therefore, when he is told that if he dare do such a thing again he as likely as not will get his discharge, and if Mr. Betteridge can't be persuaded to do

that he is still more likely to get a good thrashing for his impertinence.

"Dang your ugly mug," says Tom to him, as soon as Sir John is out of hearing; "you thought to come the clever over me and t' hounds, did yer? Ugh, they'd no more eat a bag fox than they'd touch your dirty overgrown carcass. I'd like to gi' yer what for, big as yer are;" and then the hounds crash over into the witheys, and Tom begins to draw. From the way they dash there is no doubt of a good fox this time, and presently a whimper from Bonnibel strikes the key-note. Up and down the Osiers twice he goes, with the pack close at him, and then away. No. One of the Keeper's satellites, and under-Velveteens, heads him, and he sneaks back along the wet ditch, while the hounds flash into the grass-field.

"Tall'o baik," screams Charles, who has seen it. "Will you take yourself away from there?" and Velveteens removes himself and feels humble.

One more round,' and then he does go, and sets his head straight for Colliston, a grand line, grass the whole way. The first fifty minutes is racing pace, and the grief over the big fences plentiful. Four or five minutes are lost in a small pit-hole by a farm, where the fox had tried an earth, and then they are away again, rolling him over in the open twenty minutes later.

"A real good thing," is the unanimous verdict, and the Master is only too glad to tell Mr. Betteridge, when he arrives (which he does after all has been over some time) that the present animal makes up for the morning's performance, whereat the heart of "Cotton-opolis" is made joyful again.

As they ride together to the next draw—Colliston Gorse—Mr. Betteridge begs Sir John to come and dine with him that night quite alone, and to help him to interview Mr. James. Sir John, foreseeing a good result, accepts, and after dinner, at which meal Mr. Betteridge

hears some good wholesome truths, Mr. James is sent for.

Directly he appears and sees Sir John he knows it is all up, and that the "Hearl" will not serve him a bit; and his heart fails when Sir John commences by saying: "Your master has left the matter on which we have sent for you entirely in my hands." Then, after keeping him on tenter-hooks for a quarter of an hour, and turning the man inside out, he relieves him by saying: "The fox from the Osiers saved you, but Mr. Betteridge has given his word of honour that the next time the hounds come here and there are no foxes—wild ones I mean—that day is your last with him, and you go—without a character."

Mr. James, humbled and apologetic, commences a long string of protestations and assurances of amendment, but is cut short by "That will do; go and act, don't talk." Betteridge thinks the Master the most wonderful man, and cannot make out how he braved

Mr. James and the "Hearl" so cleverly; but he is awfully grateful, and being a man of his word it is to be hoped that in future there will be foxes at Medemere, and that he will no longer be under the thumb of—the Keeper.

THE AUTHORITY.

It is ten years since Mr. Hall did the Bullshire country the honour of becoming a resident, and in that time he has managed to assert himself considerably, and may now be considered "no small pumpkins." At least the Hall family look on themselves in that light, and surely they must be the best judges.

Hall *père* is a good-natured open-handed sportsman, who rides the best horses, smokes the best cigars, and drinks the best wine that money can procure, but who has the misfortune to consider himself an authority on sport and hunting, and is also afflicted

with a weakness for seeing his lucubrations in print.

Mrs. Hall, on the other hand, affects the evangelical rôle, and is forever establishing *crèches,* forming night-schools, and endeavouring to lead the young men of Bullshire in the way that they should go. She is also of a literary turn of mind, and has published more than once under the auspices of the S.P.C.K. Her latest effort was not quite a success, owing, she says, to "bitter and unchristian hostility."

She had spent much time on the completion of a "sporto-religious" novel—"one that anybody might read without a blush," as she put it; and when finished she called it "A Heavenly Hunt, or Hints by the Way."

Harold Lappington and a few kindred spirits, however, were unkind enough to parody the book; and a week afterwards was distributed broadcast throughout the country, "Running a Ring, or Hints on Matrimony."

The joke was too good not to be ap-

preciated, and one may safely say that the only person who did not see it was Mrs. Hall herself. Even her husband laughed at her, and talked grandiloquently about writing on subjects that she did not understand.

It was for a long time a mystery to the members of the Hunt how the accounts of their sport got into the papers, and Sir John tried in vain to discover the reporter. Marvellously accurate were the descriptions of the run, names of places, distances, what each particular hound did, where Tom made his cast for better or for worse, and the various incidents or accidents of the chase were all set forth without an error. So men came to the conclusion that it must be some one of the hard-riders, and consequently were more puzzled than ever. Everybody was accused in turn—the Doctor, the Parson, even Mrs. Talford; but all denied the soft impeachment.

When the matter was alluded to at the hunt-dinner by Sir John, it was noticed that

Mr. Hall did not look quite as if he was enjoying his dinner, and whispers of "It's old Hall; look at him," passed from one to the other.

"But then Hall never rides a yard. How the deuce could he know all about it?" said others; and the matter was as far from being solved as ever.

Old Tom, however, determines to get at the bottom of it, and as he rides to Brainsty cross-roads, he maps out a plan of operations. It is not a nice day by any means, a high blustering north-east wind blowing, as Tom says, "fit to turn yer inside out;" and, as he takes refuge with the pack behind a barn, the old Huntsman does not anticipate much sport. The field arrive by twos and threes, with heads bent down and upturned collars, looking as wretched as men generally do when beating up against a gale. Almost the last comer is Mr. Hall, who immediately gives it as his opinion that there cannot possibly be any fun, and that he should not

be surprised if Sir John took the hounds home.

"I've seen 'em run hard in worse weather nor this, sir," says Tom, with a smile and a shiver.

"Well, I never have, and you may take it I know something about hunting," replies the Authority.

"What's that?" asks the Master, who has just got on to his horse.

"Nothing, Sir John; nothing. I only said that there would be no sport, and Tom seems to think differently;" and then, turning to the men about him, Mr. Hall continues: "It's impossible for any scent to lie with this wind. Besides, what fox in his senses would face it?"

"There's more nor one kind o' scent, and if t' fox wunna face t' wind, ay mun travel wi' it," puts in Tom, and then trots off best pace to draw Ambleside Banks.

When they arrive at the covert, Mr. Hall informs everybody that "It is no use going

to the far side; no fox ever breaks there. Never has done yet;" and on some of his audience paying no attention, he shouts: "Oh, all right; don't blame me if you're thrown out."

Scarcely are the words out of his mouth than the sound of Tom's horn comes down on the wind, and the pack are away in full cry, the fox breaking just where Mr. Hall had said he would not. A sharp burst over two fields, a quick turn, and then down-wind like lightning, the pace increasing every yard.

Unfortunately for the Authority, he does not notice the turn, and, riding hard along the lane for a point, he finds himself on reaching the top of a small hill utterly lost, no sign of the hounds and no sound of any sort to guide him. After riding about aimlessly in every direction for the best part of an hour, he at last hears tidings of their being down Hinckley way, and off he goes, only to hear that "T' hounds a-been gone better nor twenty minutes." It is now getting

late, so Mr. Hall makes up his mind to ride home viâ the kennels, where for a moment we will leave him and return to Tom and the rest of the field.

After ten minutes as fast as they can go, the fox tries the low wall of a farmyard, but the pace has been too hot for him, and he falls back right into the mouths of the pack. Having performed the funeral rites, Tom gets his orders for Hinckley, and then commence a series of disappointments. Foxes there are, for one is soon halloed away; but the hounds can make nothing of it directly they get into the open. Two or three times this happens, and it becomes evident that Mr. Hall was right in the main, and that they could not hunt that day. So at last the Master gives the word for home, for which few blame him.

As Tom rides along the road to the kennels, he tells Charles and Harry they are to be sure and say that it has been a first-class thing, and to back him up in everything he says. Naturally they both wonder what

the old man is up to, but Tom holds his peace, and will tell them nothing, looking the while as knowing as a jackdaw who has just hidden something valuable. Evidently he has concocted some scheme, and a light begins to dawn on the two Whips when the figure of Mr. Hall is seen in the distance.

"Why, Mayster Hall, wheer an yer been to?" says Tom, as they overtake the lost one.

"Well," replies Mr. Hall, "I don't know how it was, but when I got to Kirby I found I was clean out of it. I took the wrong turn in the wood, you see. You must have dipped the hill, and the infernal wind was so high I could not hear you."

"Dear-a me, that was a pity! you missed summat good," exclaims Tom, with a sorrowful or rather pitiful expression.

Mr. Hall eagerly snaps at the bait and asks for full particulars—whether they killed? where they went? who was up? etc. etc.; all of which information the Huntsman supplies with the gravest of countenances, inventing

as he goes along. Charles and Harry are nearly convulsed, and it is with the utmost difficulty that they are able to speak when appealed to by old Tom to corroborate his statements.

"By Jove, Tom, that was a good thing," says the Authority. "I said that they could only run down wind. You may always trust me about hunting. Why, it's nearly nine miles straight on end! How long did you say?"

"Fifty-five minutes, weren't it, Charles?" replies Tom, appealing to the First Whip.

"Summat about there," answers Charles, turning away and muttering: "Lord forgive us, what a start!"

Mr. Hall then bids good-night to the hunt-servants, and trots home as pleased as Punch.

That evening, after Sir John has finished his dinner, his butler tells him that the Huntsman wishes to speak a word to him, and then Tom tells his master the story, and what he expected would come of it.

"He'll never forgive you, Tom, if you are right in what you think; and he's one of our best supporters," exclaimed Sir John, roaring with laughter.

"Never fear, sir, never fear. I can work round him right enow; and I'm thinking, Sir John, if so be as you will say naught, but just write up the week after to contradict the whole thing, it will give Mr. Hall a lesson. He dursn't say anything, as he knows you don't like the 'ounds wrote of, and the paper won't have no more from Mr. 'Black Hat'" (the *nom de plume* of the Bullshire correspondent).

Next Saturday morning, as sure as fate, men are surprised to see a description of an extraordinary run from Ambleside, as follows:

"A Remarkably Good Day with the Bullshire.

"On Tuesday last this sporting pack had a wonderfully good run in a gale of wind. There was not a large muster at the meet

(Brainsty cross-roads) owing to the inclemency of the weather, but those who were bold enough to face the elements had no cause to regret their temerity. The first draw was Ambleside Banks, noted throughout the country for the stoutness of its foxes; and on the day in question it fully kept up its reputation, for scarcely had that best of huntsmen, Tom Wilding, thrown his hounds into covert, than a real traveller broke away with the pack almost at his brush. Strange to say he headed straight up wind, notwithstanding that, as I have said, it was blowing a gale, and made the best of his way to Kirby village; then, turning to the right, he led them a cracking pace over the vale through Shawston to Hinckley Wood; here he was inclined to hang in covert, but the hounds would not be denied, and forced him out, when he made his point for Lyston, some three miles off. The pace had been very fast and the country very stiff, so that the field was greatly reduced, and there were many

cases of *profundit humi.* Most of the first flight, however, were 'all there,' including, among others, *place aux dames,* Mrs. Talford, Sir John Lappington (the Master), Mr. Halston, and Mr. Bowles. About a mile from Lyston there was a short but welcome check, owing to the fox having been coursed by a sheep-dog; but Tom, by a judicious cast, hit off the line, and they were away again. Leaving Lyston on the left (Reynard having tried the earths there, and found no admittance), the line lay through Oxley, over the brook—which proved a serious obstacle to more than one sportsman—indeed, there were, as might have been expected considering the pace, more in than over. But to continue. Having run straight through the village of Oxley, this gallant fox made for Mr. Browne's farm on the hill; but, unfortunately for him, the hounds were close at his brush, and before he could reach that bourne the 'who-whoop' had sounded his *requiem.* Mr. Browne, with his usual hospitality, regaled

those who were there to see the end, and a nip of his famous ginger brandy was an offer not to be refused, especially with a long ride home in the teeth of the wind. The time from start to finish was an hour and five minutes, almost without a check, and the distance from point to point could not be less than nine miles. When this celebrated pack have another run such as that I have endeavoured to describe, may I be again there to see.

"BLACK HAT."

"Who the deuce can have written all that farrago of nonsense?" says Mr. Boulter. "Why, we never ran more than a mile and a half." And the Secretary is not the only one who makes anxious inquiries.

Mr. Hall has been away in London, and, having only returned that morning is in blissful ignorance of the way he has been taken in.

As he arrives there is a general shout of

"Here, Hall, you're an Authority; some idiot has been cooking up an account of Tuesday's sport and writing to the papers. You never read such a pack of lies in your life. We must stop this sort of thing. What should be done?"

The gentleman's feelings can be better imagined than described, and as he stammers out "I have not seen the paper," he wishes himself elsewhere.

It is noticed that that day he does not give his opinion on the whereabouts of a fox in quite such an authoritative manner, and avoids everybody as much as possible. Of course he soon hears the true account, and on the following Saturday his cup is filled when he reads under the same heading as his own—viz. "A Remarkably Good Day with the Bullshire"—

"Sir,—I beg to inform you that the account of a run on Tuesday week with these hounds, which you gave in your last

issue, was entirely fictitious, as we had no sport after the first ten minutes, the hounds being unable to hunt.— I remain yours obediently,

"J. LAPPINGTON, Master B.H."

How old Tom managed to smooth the irate individual down is not known, but nothing more ever came of it, save that "Black Hat" no longer sends accounts to the papers of sport with the Bullshire Hounds.

THE BLACKSMITH.

SEVEN A.M. The church clock rings out the hour in the clear still morning, and the smoke goes up straight into the air from the chimneys of the cottages of Lappington village. One by one the good dames appear at their doors with tucked-up sleeves and heads beshawled, and commence the operation of vigorously shaking strips of carpet, and generally setting things straight.

Their lords and masters have ere this gone to their work, and, with the inevitable short pipe in their mouths, are tramping along best pace to keep up a circulation and keep out the chill of the early morn.

But there is another sound which mingles itself with the chiming clock and the Babel of female voices; it is the measured "clang, clang" of iron to iron, and as one wends one's way towards that part of the village from whence it comes, the dull roar of the furnace and the sparks flying upwards tell us that we are approaching "t' smithy," and that Joe Billings and his mate are hard at work.

Presently, three of the Squire's horses are seen coming up the road in their clothing, and Joe, having nearly completed the shoeing of the farm nags that had been there since half-past six, turns his attention to the wants of their more noble companions. "Two shod all round and one removed," says the groom as he comes up; "and look here, old man, don't keep us waiting no longer than you can help; it's a bit chilly this morning."

"First come first served," replies Joe; and turning to his mate: "'Ere, Bill, look out them 'unting shoes for t' Squire's 'osses. Who-ho, mare, 'old up;" and the rasp of the file again

plays an accompaniment to the tune that Joe whistles as he works.

"Now then, mayster," says he to the Squire's groom as he finishes; and the hunters being brought up to the forge the anvil chorus strikes up, and the lads clap their hands as the sparks fly from the red-hot iron. More horses arrive, and grooms grumble among themselves at having to wait their turn. Some try and persuade Joe by soft words to give them precedence, others say they wish they had gone to some rival shop; but Joe pays no attention to them, merely giving vent to his favourite maxim: "First come first served."

At last one impatient youngster who does not know the Lappington Blacksmith, having only come down from London a few days before, commences to bully, and says: "Look 'ere, I ain't going to 'ave my 'osses catch their deaths of cold while you tinkers that moke," pointing to a rough pony belonging to a small market-gardener. "I'll just speak to my governor about it. I'm d——d if I'll come

here again. Gemmen's 'osses first's what I say—do'e hear, slow coach?"

Never a word answers Joe, and the by-standers smile; but the young groom loses his temper, and tries to take the "moke," as he calls it, away, and substitute his own horses.

Then Joe does look up, and dropping the foot on which he was at work, says: "My lad, you'll get yourself into trouble in a minute."

"How's that?" asks the groom.

"Why," replies Joe slowly, "if you don't drop that pony's head in two twos, I shall have to teach you manners. I ain't a quarrelsome chap, but when a whipper-snapper like you comes messing with my business it's a bit too hot. I'm blowed if I shan't have to lock you up, or put you in the pond. Drop it, will yer?" and then, as the young fool persists, he suddenly walks up to him, seizes him as he would a dog, and putting him into a shed where he keeps his old iron, turns the key, and with a chuckle resumes his work, whistling the while as gaily as ever.

Nor does he let the infuriated master of the horse out of his confinement till he has finished the quadrupeds, when, opening the door, with mock politeness, he says: "Your lordship's 'osses is done, if so be you've a mind to take 'em away."

Shouts of laughter greet the groom as he emerges from the shed, and angry as he is he has sense enough to see that the laugh is not on his side; so without a word he trots off, inwardly vowing vengeance against Joe Billings.

"There'll be a bother over this job, Joe," says Harry the Second Whip, who has come down to the forge from the kennels. "Young Cock-a-hoop will make a fine tale of it when he gets home."

"Well," replies Joe, "what can they do? If they takes the shoeing away it won't break me, and when I says a thing I means it. Them as comes first is served first, and if they don't like it they can lump it."

After finishing off with Harry, Joe slips on

his coat (such a coat too! all patched, grimy, and full of small holes burnt by the sparks), and, rolling up his leather apron, he takes himself away to see if "t' missus has got breakfast ready." Half an hour suffices for his meal, and by the time he returns he finds quite a string awaiting his arrival, and he sets to work with a will.

At last he comes to a horse shod on the French system, with the shoe let in and the frog on the ground, and he calls his mate to point it out. "Here, Bill," says he, "here's one of them Charley shoes as I was a-telling you of. Did yer ever see such a fanglement?" "Why, there ain't no bloomin' shoe at all," replies his assistant, gazing open-mouthed, and listening to Joe's lecture on the subject. "Be we to shoe 'un like that, I wonder?"

"No, no, my lad," interrupts the groom in charge; "the governor only tried it as an experiment, and he wants the 'oss shod in the usual way again."

"Proper way, you means," says Joe; "you

won't catch me a-doing an animal after that fashion, I can tell yer. Them experiments is all very well for the Mossoos, who don't 'unt, but when it comes to gitting over a country—laws, it's ridickerlous!"

By ten o'clock Joe has pretty nearly finished, except an odd job or two, such as tacking on a loose shoe for Mr. Grimes the butcher, or "fettling up" old Betty Wilson's donkey, and he has time to turn his attention to a ploughshare or a harrow that requires doctoring, or maybe the springs of Farmer Giles's tax-cart.

As he is engaged on one of these a lad runs in panting and out of breath with a message as "'ow Mr. Stiles would be main glad if Mayster Billings would step over and look at t' red coo, as 'e's afeard on 'er dropping."

"Right, my lad," says Joe; "just nip down and tell my missus to give yer my medicine-box and that bottle of stuff as stands in the winder, and then come back wi' 'em."

It may be gathered from this that Joe combines the office of cow-doctor with his other employment; and I may safely say that a better one of the old-fashioned school could hardly be found anywhere. Certainly his remedies for both cow and horse are simple to a degree. Nevertheless, he is entirely successful, and by a sort of rule of thumb dispenses medicine, of which the analysis may be peculiar, but the efficacy undoubted.

He has the greatest contempt for all veterinary surgeons, and is wont to say he "would as soon shoot the beast as let them mess any cow of his about."

Patent medicine is another of his pet aversions, and it is a sort of standing joke to ask him his opinion of "Hoplemuroma" or "Neurasthenhipponskellisterizon."

"Oh, get out. Don't come blathering me with yer hops and skillyrison!" he will say. "'Ow the deuce do I know what muck they puts into 'em? Suppose I was to call one of my oils 'Smithyjoebillingtonyeyson,' what

the —— would old Farmer Stiles say, and what better stuff would it be for all its crack-jaw name? No, damme, call a spade a spade. None o' that new-fangled bosh for Joe Billings."

Joe has been at the smithy for some five-and-twenty years now, and though he numbers considerably over fifty years of age, is as hale and hearty a man as one would wish to see. One failing he has got which generally attacks him on Saturday nights, and that is a miscalculation as to the amount of liquor he can comfortably carry. A dangerous man is he to cross when in his cups, moreover, for his arm is as powerful as the leg of a horse, and he has besides got some knowledge of the noble art.

Indeed it is within the recollection of many a Lappingtonian how Joe at one time fought with the "Brummagem Pet" for twenty-five pounds a-side, and how, though terribly mauled, he stuck to it like a man, and, blinded as he was, managed in the sixteenth round to

knock "the Pet" out of time with a terrific left-hander on the temple, shouting as he delivered the blow: "There's a taste of Bullshire for yer!"

However, it is not often that the sturdy Blacksmith gets into a row, for he would far sooner sit still and listen to an account of a good run or the records of some bygone champion of the Ring. Indeed, everything connected with sport of any kind goes straight to his soul, and that there are few sporting subjects you can mention he does not know something about is evident from the pertinent remarks he occasionally lets fall.

On a hunting-day, if the hounds are anywhere within reach, Joe may be seen at the smithy with an array of different-sized shoes ready laid out beside him, and as he works on some job in the shop he keeps one eye down the road, on the look-out for some unfortunate sportsman who has had the misfortune to get a shoe off.

It is his pride that he can tack a shoe

on quicker than any man in the country. "Yer see," he says, "I 'as 'em all ready by me, and when I sees the gent a-coming, I 'ain't got no cause to look 'ere and there and heverywhere for the stuff I wants. There they are, and it's on and away in a jiff."

All the time he is asking the sportsman about the day: "What sort of a run? where he left the hounds? and where they was a-going to draw next?" And then, having received his due, he will step outside, take a look which way the wind is, and direct the thrown-out fox-hunter as to his most likely course in order to hit off the hounds again.

Odd to say, he is seldom wrong (unless, indeed, they have had a quick find, and gone away before the sportsman arrives at the indicated spot); for long experience has taught Joe all the short cuts in the country, together with which he combines an innate knowledge of the run of a fox. Old Tom Wilding the Huntsman, and Sir John Lappington the Master, are, in his opinion, the two greatest men in

England. For, as he puts it, "Without them two where would be the 'ounds? and without the 'ounds where would my bloomin' business go to?"

Then perhaps someone will point out that he might make a better thing out of cow-doctoring; but his reply will be: "Oh, that's your opinion, is it? well, it ain't mine. Look'ee 'ere—any fool, 'cept a vetery, who's got a ounce of sense, can do a cow; but mark yer, it takes a goodish time to make a man a blacksmith; and though I say it as perhaps shouldn't, there ain't a man as I gives in to in the matter of shoeing an 'oss, no matter where he comes from. No, as long as I can use my arm" (and he bares a limb that would not disgrace a statue of Hercules), "and there's any wind in the old bellows, I sticks to t' smithy. Blacksmith I was bred, and so I'll die; and all I wants is, when our ould parson 'as finished the reading over my grave, to 'ave a plain bit of a 'ead-stone put up, with simple 'Joe Billings, the Lappington Blacksmith,' wrote on it;" and

then Joe will turn to and whistle a lively air, just to get the idea of his demise out of his head, and the bystanders will say among themselves that at present they can't spare old Joe, who has for five-and-twenty years made the sparks fly and rung out the anvil chorus in the smithy at Lappington.

THE RUNNER.

THERE is no better-known individual in the whole of the Bullshire Hunt perhaps than Jack Whistler the Runner, or, as is he more commonly called, "Jumping Jack." His antecedents are somewhat obscure, and various contradictory stories are told as to who he is and what he was; but his presence at the end of a long run, or in any spot where he thinks he may have the chance of earning an honest shilling, is a positive certainty.

How he manages to turn up at the right moment is only another of the mysteries which surround him; but the fact remains the same,

that Jack has solved the problem of "how to be in two places at once" most satisfactorily. No matter how long the day has been, or how many miles he has to go back to the place where he is supposed to have his home, the next day you will see him at the meet as fresh as paint, in his old pink-and-brown leather gaiters, with the same keen eye and half-saucy smile on his face as he doffs his well-worn velvet cap at your approach.

Full of quaint humour is Jack, with many a story of sport, and many a reminiscence of flood and field, which he delights in relating to anyone he can get to listen to him.

"Ger on with yer," he will say to a crowd of gaping rustics; "ger on with yer—call last Wednesday's a run? Why, bless yer, I remember in the old Squire's time, when we run from Finchley cross-roads to Ipply Gorse, better nor five-and-twenty mile, and old Mayster Simpson got up to his neck in the brook, and I stood on the bank fit to bust mysen with larfin, and wouldna pull un out

under two half-crowns. Ah! them was days, I can tell yer."

And then, some mounted cavalier arriving, off goes the hunting-cap, and he accosts the sportsman with "Morning, captin'; fine scenting day; hold your horse? thankee, sir," all in one breath.

Not a hound in the pack but what knows him and is glad to see him; and he can call them all by name, and give you their pedigree without a mistake. As old Tom says: "Where he picks up his knowledge Lord knows, but 'e's never wrong, and, by Guy, 'e's a puzzler to be sure."

It is getting near the end of the season, and the weather is just a trifle warm, as old Tom with the hounds overtakes Jack Whistler making his way towards the meet at Fairleigh. There is a breakfast there, and Jack likes to be in time on those occasions, for he knows that he will earn many a sixpence before the actual work begins, besides getting his day's food and drink gratis.

"Hollo, old man, what have yer got there? going a-fishing?" exclaims Tom as he comes up with the pedestrian. "What's that thing for?" pointing to a light pole that Jack is balancing on his shoulder.

"Fishing be blowed," is the reply, "it's my jumper. Don't yer see it's a bit 'ot, and old Riley" (a fellow-runner in a neighbouring pack) "put me up to the tip last week as ever was. He says, says he: 'Why don't yer have a pole made? it ain't much to carry, and you can get over hanythink with it.' So I've had this fettled up, and I've been practising a bit with it, and I can go fine now I can tell yer."

"Oh, that's it, is it?" says Tom. "Well, I should a thought it were more trouble than it were worth carrying a great fishing-rod of a thing like that about."

"Ger out," retorts Jack; "it ain't nothing when yer used to it. I thought it were a new-fangled notion at first, and I came nigh breaking my neck two or three times over a pigsty wall afore I got into it; but look'ee 'ere, it's as

easy as shelling peas;" and Jack proceeds to show Tom his prowess in the noble art of saltation.

Taking a short run, with a "Ger back, hounds," he essays to top the fence out of the road; but, alas, to the intense amusement of Tom and the two Whips, his pole sinks into some soft ground, and poor Jack falls all of a heap into the wet ditch on the far side, uttering the while exclamations the reverse of complimentary against the treacherous friend of his travels that had so basely betrayed him.

When he appears, scratched and muddy, in the road again, as soon as Tom can stop laughing he advises him to "leave the bloomin' pole where it is, and not go cutting any more capers of that sort." But Jack's dander is up, and his only reply is to shoulder his weapon and walk on. Presently they arrive at the fixture, and Mr. Whistler's hands are quite full. Indeed, what between laying in a cargo for himself and looking after horses while their

owners do the like, he has not much time to talk.

Then comes the business of altering stirrups, tightening girths, and looking after his tips. A marvellous memory does Jack show in this latter respect. Vain indeed is it to try and put on an air of unconcern at his approach, as if you had never seen him before, or as if you had entirely forgotten the service he rendered you when you got that spill last week, and he recovered your horse for you on the promise of half-a-crown.

Jack remembers the circumstance well and the promise better, and he will sidle up to you with a smile, and say: "Mornin', cap'n. None the worse for the fall? Have not seen yer out since. Hope you won't forget Jack;" and then, having received his recompense, his quick eye catches sight of another debtor, and with a "Thank'ee kindly, sir," he is off to collect more dues.

What he likes best is being taken as a pilot by some comparative stranger to the

country, whose heart is not placed in that position requisite to enable him to follow the hounds or ride straight. Then he is in his glory, and from his knowledge of the highways and byways he invariably manages to nick in at various points, and eventually brings his craft safely into port without any casualties.

Of course for this he expects something handsome, and though he makes no bargain he has got a way of returning thanks for any gift he deems insufficient that shows plainly enough his opinion, and generally extracts something in addition. To-day, by the time the hounds move off, Jack has made quite a haul, for, being near the end of the season, men have "remembered the Runner." He is in high feather, and what between pleasure and the effects of the old ale, he is a little unsteady and more garrulous than usual.

"Wheer to, Mayster Wilding?" he asks Tom, as he shoulders his pole and swings it in close proximity to the Huntsman's head.

"Mind what you're a-doin' of, a-poking a fellow's eye out with that thing. We're a goin' to draw the gorse first, but you'd better leave that blessed article behind, or you'll be killing somebody," retorts Tom, riding off, while Jack, with a laugh, swings off best pace towards the first draw, and as soon as he arrives at the gorse places himself in a commanding position to await the turn of events.

Just as the hounds are thrown in there is a bit of commotion down at the other end, and a loose horse galloping past tells the tale of a misfortune. Away goes Jack in hot chase, and manages to catch the riderless steed in a trice. When he returns he finds it is Mr. Betteridge, who, having trusted himself on a new purchase, has been fain to dismount rather more hurriedly than he intended. However, no bones are broken, and Jack, having added another bit of silver to his day's earnings, betakes himself to where he had left his pole.

It is a quick find, and the fox breaks close by Mr. Whistler, who, as soon as he sees him

well away, gives vent to his feelings in a somewhat beery view hollo, and then proceeds to follow as fast as he can. At the bottom of the meadow, below the gorse, runs a broadish brook, and a good many turn away for the road and bridge which spans the obstacle. On any other occasion Jack would have done the same, but his failure in the road and old Tom's laughter still rankles in his bosom, and as he runs down towards the water he clutches his pole and says to himself: "I'll show some on 'em as I ain't a-going to be second. I'll pound a few on 'em I'll bet. I do 'ope that old beggar Tom 'ull get a wet jacket."

As the hounds dash in and feather about on the other side, Tom and the hard-riders pull up to see which way the line lies and whether the fox is over or not. But Jack does not stop a moment, and with an exultant shout of "Come on, gents, what are yer waiting for?" he jumps as far as he can, and, holding his pole in a slanting position, plunges it in to aid him in his journey over the water.

The pole touches the bottom and then sinks into about two feet of mud, leaving Jack suspended in mid-air. A momentary pause, and with a "Rot the thing!" the Runner disappears from view beneath the waters of the brook, emerging on the other side half drowned and covered with black slime, while the instrument of his misfortune remains erect in the middle.

"I *thought* you was a-going fishing," says Tom with a chuckle; as he lands safe by the side of Jack, and then as he passes him to get to the hounds: "You'd better take a few lessons from your pal Riley afore you try again."

The rest of the spectators are nearly in a state of collapse with laughter, both at the pitiable sight Jack presents as well as at the murderous glances he casts at the pole; but hounds are running and there is no time to lose, so the chase sweeps past and he is left alone in his misery to make the best of his way home. As soon as Jack has scraped him-

self a bit clean and wrung out his coat, he feels carefully in his pockets to see if all his gains are safe; and finding everything right in that respect he brightens up, and leaving his pole where it is, moves off at a brisk jog-trot to the nearest public to *dry* the outer and *wet* the inner man.

When next he appears at the door he shows evident signs that he has accomplished the latter part of his purpose, for his course is anything but straight, and after taking nearly an hour to do half a mile he manages to stagger into a barn, where in a few moments he is "wrapt in sweet slumber."

He is not, however, likely to take any harm from the proceeding, for he is used to the sort of sleeping-place, and will turn out next morning—a little red about the eyes perhaps—but ready to go any distance with the hounds, and, what is more, equally ready for some more of the "hair of the dog that bit him."

Passionately fond of hounds and hunting,

he enjoys life thoroughly during the winter, and lives on the fat of the land; but when what he calls the "stinking violets and primroses" appear, things are not so pleasant. "Othello's occupation gone," he has to fall back on odd jobs and an occasional half-a-crown from Sir John or some of his friends, and, failing these, may be generally found "at home" at the "red house," maybe better known as the "workus."

Vagabond he is, and vagabond he will remain. Nevertheless, there is many a man who would be sorry to hear of anything serious happening to Jack Whistler the Bullshire Runner.

THE MAN AT THE TOLL-BAR.

THE greatest friend or enemy of John Pillings could hardly accuse him of being either an over-sociable or too-genial individual. In fact, he has earned throughout the length and breadth of the county the nickname of "Ould Sulky," and is perhaps better known by that sobriquet than by the more lawful patronymic bestowed upon him by his parents and his godfather and godmother at his baptism.

This being the case, it may fairly be said that Pillings has at last settled down into his proper place, and is one of the few instances of the "round man in a round hole."

He has not always been at the toll-gate; on the contrary, his life has been somewhat varied, and he has experienced a good many of the ups and downs of the world.

He began by being "bound 'prentice" to a carpenter, but his temper was against him, and so when his time was up he took to the more active life of a sailor.

Here again his enemy found him out, and he said good-bye to his shipmates without much sorrow on their part. "'Bout as much use a-talking to *him* as a marlinspike. Mate yer calls him! Nasty sulky beggar! In everybody's mess and nobody's watch," was the general verdict of the men; so it was no wonder they were glad to see him go over the side.

For the second time Mr. Pillings was in want of a job, and on this occasion he took to butchering, which he thought might be more likely to agree with his temperament. But in about two months he quarrelled with his master, and after they had had it out in

the slaughter-house Pillings found himself once more in the world with three half-crowns in his pocket, about ten pounds at the bank, and a pair of as beautiful black eyes as one would wish to see, to say nothing of a nose three times its proper size, and a good many teeth very shaky.

When he had got his countenance back to its pristine beauty he tried his hand at The Red Cow as barman, and, strange to say, he managed to get on in this capacity very well.

The Red Cow, it must be known, is an inn much frequented by the knights of the pencil, so that Pillings, by keeping his ears open, and by a few judicious investments, soon managed to make a nice little nest-egg for himself; and having fallen a victim to the charms of the chambermaid, he offered to share his fortune with her.

Unfortunately for him the lady was "willing," and in a few months became Mrs. P., and shortly afterwards a mother.

The landlord of The Red Cow, on finding it out, was exceeding wroth, and sent John and his spouse packing instanter, which, as may be supposed, did not improve the man's temper or conduce to the domestic happiness of his wife.

After various ups and downs too numerous to enter into, to make a long story short, John Pillings, through the interest of a "friend at court," found himself installed at the gate-house, with nothing to do but open the gate, take the toll, and occasionally vary the monotony of existence by getting tipsy and belabouring his spouse. The latter event has become more frequent of late years, as, unlike the generality of things, the older he gets the *tighter* he gets, and often people are surprised to find the gate open and no one to take the money, "Old Sulky" being drunk in bed, and his wife having taken refuge with a neighbour until her husband is all right again.

When he is not in a hopeless condition

he is as smart as needs be, and a very 'cute man indeed it would have to be who could manage to evade the toll while the Man at the Gate was on the look-out.

What Pillings likes best is, on a market morning to keep the gate shut, and then when the farmers come hurrying up and shout: "Now then, gate; hi! gate," he will turn out, look up and down the road, and go slowly up to the tax-cart, or whatever the indignant individual may be in, and say "Toll."

"Hang you; open the gate, and look sharp," is the probable reply, as the money is handed down.

"Sha'n't go no quicker; ain't paid no more for looking sharp. If ye'r in such a bloomin' hurry, open it yerself," says Pillings, as he slowly unfastens the bolt and swings the gate back, laughing to himself as the farmers, pouring imprecations on his head, dash through.

More than once has "Ould Sulky" been the object of such delicate attentions as having

his door nailed up, and twice has the toll-gate been lifted off its hinges and carried bodily into the next parish. A very short time ago a few adventurous spirits, coming home from the market-town and finding the toll-gate open, stormed the gate-house, where Pillings was lying dead-drunk upstairs, and lifting him into their trap they carried him off to the nearest pound, where, having borrowed a wheelbarrow, they left him for the night; and the next morning the people of the village were astonished to see the keeper of the toll-bar reposing, *à la* Pickwick, "drunk in a wheelbarrow."

John Pillings was perfectly furious, and did all he could to find out with the aid of the police who the offenders were; but the matter coming to the ears of Sir John Lappington in his capacity as chairman of the bench of magistrates, he thought it best to give "Ould Sulky" a timely hint that, unless he reformed, he would find himself again on

the world, and also recommended him strongly to give up searching for his abductors.

Perhaps the Master's brother, Harold Lappington, having been the prime mover in the freak, had as much to do with this sage counsel as Sir John's magisterial capacity; but no matter how that is, suffice it that Pillings dropped the subject like a hot potato, and fell back on his own thoughts for comfort.

He says now: "I'll be even with them scamps some day, or my name ain't Pillings. As soon as ever I finds out—and find 'em I will, police or no police—I'll smash 'em; you see."

Old Tom and the Master he holds in great dread, and looks up to them with as much veneration as his nature is capable of feeling. But for the common herd, *alias* the field, he has no respect, and often makes himself exceedingly unpleasant to boot. If the hounds happen to run his way, and the macadam brigade come galloping down the road, "Ould

Sulky" is out in a jiff, and bang goes the gate, while he stands in front and utters the monosyllabic "Toll."

"Oh, all right, open the gate, the last man will pay," shouts someone.

"You'll only go through one at a time, and you'll each pay, or I'll know the reason why. I've never found that last cove 'as any money along with him," retaliates Pillings; and there he will stand taking each man's money and fumbling about for the change, till all the luckless ones are through and the hounds are well out of sight and hearing.

Then "Sulky" will retire to his den with a chuckle and put away the money, muttering to himself: "Last chap 'ull pay! Likely as I'm going to be took in a that 'uns. Don't fancy they'll see much of t' hounds again anyhow."

Of course if Sir John or Tom happens to be there Pillings is civility itself, and there is no question of first or last, for he knows it would not do, and that if he were to play those sort of pranks with the Master his place would not be

worth an hour's purchase. As it is, he is often hard put to it to find an excuse for his behaviour; but he somehow manages to escape by the skin of his teeth, and from constant repetition his performances are looked upon as a regular institution in the county.

It is, however, whispered abroad that another year will see a different face at the gate, for even the most conservative of mortals is apt to tire of John's rudeness, and so they are only waiting a favourable opportunity in order to get rid of him altogether.

They have repeatedly tried to have the turnpike removed from the road, and have pointed out the inconvenience and annoyance of the thing; but hitherto their efforts have been of no avail, so now they have given it up as a bad job, and have banded themselves together to catch out the principal cause of the nuisance. If they are successful, and Pillings is again out of employment, it will be a difficult matter with him to find bread for himself and wife, for it is extremely

doubtful whether anyone in Bullshire would care to have so morose and drunken a servant about their premises.

Perhaps after a month or two in the workhouse, he may turn over a new leaf and so get some berth; but under existing circumstances, as old Tom told him one day, if he loses his place he will have either to starve or let himself out as a scarecrow at so much a-day. Therefore, for his own sake, it is to be hoped next season he will improve his manners, and so remain in the only position for which he is suited—to wit, the Man at the Toll-bar.

WHO-WHOOP!

A BRIGHT warm morning in April, with just enough keenness in the air to make one say to oneself: "There's a chance of a scent this morning."

A day on which that peculiar freshness of the new-born spring seems to pervade everything. The buds on the roadside hedges, wet with a passing shower, sparkle and glint in the sunshine, and the grass on the banks is green and moist.

Even old Tom feels the effect of the glorious day, though he does anathematise the "stinking violets" as he rides to the closing meet at Fallow Field, and wonders

"'ow in the name of all that's merciful t' hounds can work in cover with the 'nation primroses a-coming out."

Still, he knows well that there has been such a thing before now as a real "buster" in April, and he looks approvingly on the surroundings, and mutters to himself that, "If t' sun wunna come out too strong, they may be able to do summat arter all."

As the hounds move jauntily along, it is evident to the merest tyro that their condition is as nearly perfect as can be, and that the wear and tear of the past season has had but little effect on them. Indeed Tom is quite ready to go on the whole year round if it were possible; and as Harry rides after Belldame, whose spirits have got the better of her discipline (an old hare in the hedgerow having proved irresistible), he says: "Let t' ould bitch alone, Harry; 'er won't 'ave another chance this year, more's the pity; they mun do as they're a-mind to-day—till wa cum to business at all events."

So Belldame saves her bacon, and the old hare having got clean off, she returns to her place looking somewhat crestfallen.

Everybody in the country is at Fallow Field—men on horses of all sorts, shapes, and sizes. Even a donkey carries a living freight for the day, and is transformed into a "perfect fencer." Vehicles of every description are drawn up at the trysting-place, from the mail-phaeton and pair of steppers to the more humble conveyance of the costermonger.

Those who can find nothing whereon they may ride are fain to turn out afoot, but turn out they do in scores; and no wonder, for in a country like Bullshire, where every man, woman, and child have the spirit of sport strong upon them, each one is bound to see the last day of the season, and if they cannot all hope to be in at the death, still they can see the hounds find and go away, which is more than half the battle, and will give food for conversation for many a week afterwards.

Of course all our old friends are there.

The Parson and Doctor ride up together, and receive quite an ovation from the foot-people; then shortly afterwards the popular Secretary arrives, and causes the usual commotion among the gentlemen in arrears with their subscriptions.

The Simmses have joined old Tom and the hounds on the road, and their advent is the signal for a ringing cheer, which is quickly suppressed when Sir John is seen cantering up with Harold, Mrs. Talford, and the Colonel; the Major, with a heap more, bringing up the rear.

Of course the Major has a deal of fault to find with everything, as usual; and, equally of course, the Boaster is spinning a yarn of his own prowess, and endeavouring to impress Mr. Betteridge with the idea that he is the only man of the hunt who has gone straight during the season.

Jack the Runner is making a good haul, and, were he provident, might be able to lay by a little store to help through the summer;

but, as we know, he is exactly the reverse, and whatever he earns to-day will be clean gone by the end of the week, if not before.

"Well, Tom," says the Parson, from the middle of the pack (he has dismounted, and is surrounded by his favourites), "I suppose you won't be sorry to give the horn a bit of rest, eh? What say you, Minstrel?" turning to the old hound.

"Sorry, Master Halston; I shanna know what to do wi' mysen till wa begin cubbing. It's allas the same, and t' hounds feel it just like I," replies Tom. "But never mind," he continues with a smile, "if so be as you'll gie us a sermon now and again about fox-'unting, I make no doubt we shall do."

"Well, Tom, I should be puzzled for a text, I think," rejoins the Parson; "perhaps you will find one for me."

At which remark the bystanders smile, for old Tom is not a very regular attendant; but the smile breaks into a loud peal of laughter when the Huntsman retaliates as quick as

thought by saying: "Ay, I wull; you wunna have far to look. You can take for the first Sunday, 'Many dogs a-cum about me;' and then for the next week, as a wind-up, you can give us 'The fat bulls of Bashan,' and say what a murdering nuisance they was a-crossing the line." And with a "Coop, coom away, hounds," he rides away, having scored one most emphatically.

At this juncture Sir John, having pulled out his watch, gives the signal, and away they trot to the first draw, which unfortunately proves a blank, as does the next, whereat Tom's soul waxeth wroth, and for five minutes the vengeance of the gods is called down on the "stinking violets," and other articles which in his opinion militate against the scent.

The third essay seems likely for a long time to be as unproductive as the two former, when suddenly a whimper from Ranter, backed up by Harbinger, sends a thrill through the veins of the eager field.

Tom is all life in a moment, and his "'Ave at 'im. Eugh, 'ave at 'im! Eugh, boys!" rings out clear and shrill.

Not so shrill, though, as Charles's "Tally-ho! gone awa-a-y! awa-a-a-y!" which comes pealing through the trees from the bottom end, while the pack, catching it up, ring out a chorus that would waken the dead.

"Hounds, please, hounds! Hold hard, gentlemen!" roars Sir John to some of the too enthusiastic fire-eaters as they gallop down the squashy ride, vainly endeavouring to get ahead of Tom, who, with white hair flying in the breeze, is vigorously cheering his hounds on to the line, occasionally giving them a chink of music to dance to.

At last the wood is cleared, and the pack are streaming over the grass. Nearly everybody has got a good start, and each man, knowing it is his last day, rides his best.

Mrs. Talford, as usual, is going along to the fore, second to none; and Mr. Halston is determined that if the "fat bulls" do cross

the line, he at all events will be well enough up to note the exact spot where the catastrophe occurred.

Falls are plentiful, for the pace is hot, and the weather being of the same temperature, horses are soon, as Tom says, "all a muck o' sweat," and find the fencing no light matter.

However, "For'ard on" they race, and for five-and-thirty minutes without a check, till they throw up suddenly by a thick ivy-grown hedge.

"By Guy," says Tom, as he makes his cast and mops his face with a large red silk bandana, "by Guy, it's warm, and no mistak'." Then after a bit, as the hounds seem quite at sea: "Dashed if the varmint 'ain't melted."

Not quite. He has only run the hedge right along the top of the ivy till he came to the cross-fence, and then jumping down has set his head straight for Woodborough; and Minstrel, casting on his own account, hits off the spot where he landed on terra-firma, and

in loud tones proclaims it to the world in general and his companions in particular.

At it again they are in a crack, and the welcome check having allowed a chance of getting "second wind," the field are all well up and as merry as crickets. Soon, however, the pace begins to tell, and the "tailing" is terrible; as they go on each successive ditch holds a victim, and the flyers of the hunt are all forced to take a pull.

The best of the horses are beginning to sob, and old Tom has serious misgivings about having to finish the run afoot. But it's a long lane that has no turning, and two fields ahead the fox is seen crawling along dead beat. The hounds run from scent to view, then comes a last final rush.

A confused mass, a worry, and then Tom's "Who-whoop! who-whoop!" is heard a mile back, and tells those struggling in the wake that the gallant pack have run into their fox, and that the Bullshire hounds have

finished their season with a rattling run ending in a kill.

As the word "Home" is given by Sir John, and old Tom rides off amid the congratulations of all who have managed to get to the end, he casts a look of pride at his darlings clustered round him, and mutters: "Ay, bad luck to it; it's 'Who-whoop' till next season."

THE FIRST OF THE SEASON.

Old friends are all meeting and gathered together
In batches, discussing the crops and the weather;
It has been a hard struggle for some with the rent,
But their troubles grow light as the talk turns on scent.

The landlord and tenant, the farmer and squire,
Have all had to suffer and pocket their ire,

At the sun's fitful gleam and the rain's
ceaseless pour;
But they meet in good fellowship round the
inn-door.

Their thoughts are all bent upon horses and
hounds,
For shortly the covert will echo with sounds,
As the eager pack top the wood-fence with a
crash,
The young entry all bustle and brimful of
dash.

Now see to your girths if you mean to be
there.
Old Tom looks like business; his hand's in
the air.
A whimper—a chorus—hark, hollo! they've
found,
And his old mare pops over the rails with a
bound.

Away fling that weed, catch your horse by the head,
He's young, and he's hot, but he's clean thoroughbred;
Don't rush at the timber or else you'll be down.
Let him see what's before him—he'll jump o'er a town.

They are over the brook, which is bankful, I swear;
See, yonder they go with their sterns in the air.
There's young Flyaway in, and, by Jove, what a cropper!
Ah, the others won't have it—I thought 'twas a stopper.

Thank goodness, they're checked by that herd of Scotch kine.
But, hark for'ard, old Minstrel has hit off the line.

There'll be "bellows to mend" if this goes on, I fear,
For the pace is too hot for the first of the year.

Down the meadow—they view—see the hounds how they tear!
They have him! Who-whoop! And the field are all—where?
Here we come. Scarce a coat but betokens a fall,
But who-whoop! what a cracker to open the ball!

MORAL.

Fox-hunting and fellowship go hand in hand,
And a true sporting mind by a friend's sure to stand;
So let each drain a bumper nor think it high treason
To follow The Queen with "The First of the Season."

The bond of good feeling is found in the
field;
As the Squire meets the Farmer the compact
is sealed.
And each vows, as the moments flit merrily
by,
The world has no music like hounds in full
cry.

UNCLE JOHN'S NEW HORSE.

A LETTER I found on my table, addressed to Edward Milford, Esq., Duke Street, St. James's, which, being my name and address, I took the liberty of opening, reminded me of the fact that I was engaged to my uncle for the Christmas holidays.

It ran as follows :

"The Grange, Slopton.

"MY BOY,

"You are booked to us for Christmas, so don't fail. It is to be ten days this time, and no telegram 'on important business' to call you away, as, if I remember right, was

the case on your last visit. There are many attractions here, or will be by the time you arrive. First, myself; secondly, a new horse, which you will have the pleasure of trying for me; and, thirdly, your cousin Grace. There are a few pheasants, and, besides, some of the old port. You will find a hearty welcome from your affectionate

"UNCLE JOHN."

Uncle John (whose surname was Dawson) was the sole surviving relation from whom I had any expectations. He was my mother's brother, and on the death of both my parents had been left my guardian. He had never married; but about the same time that he undertook to train me in the path in which I should go, he had adopted the orphan child of his brother, and it was almost an understood thing that his property would, at his demise, be equally divided between myself and Grace Dawson, the lady referred to in his letter as cousin Grace.

A thorough sportsman of the old school, whose creed lay in horse, hound, and hospitality, he made The Grange as pleasant a place to stop at as one could well find. But there was (as there is in every enjoyment) one drawback—to me at least—and that lay in the "new horse."

My worthy uncle, excellent rider as he was, happened to be the worst judge of a horse in the world, and was always picking up wonderful bargains which, unfortunately, he insisted on my trying for him. How it is that I have hitherto escaped with an unbroken neck I cannot say; for there is scarcely any circus-rider in the United Kingdom who dare lay claim to more double somersaults, and I might almost say that I am an expert at flying in all its branches.

However, nothing venture nothing have; and I was not going to quarrel with Uncle John through any fear of Uncle John's new horse, besides the attraction of cousin Grace. So I sent an answer accepting the invitation,

and giving the train by which I should arrive.

It was a cold cheerless afternoon when, having wrapped myself up in my railway-rug, I selected a regalia reina and proceeded to settle myself in the space allotted to me by a magnanimous railway company in a smoking carriage attached to the 3.50 P.M to Slopton.

There are three things that, when travelling, invariably strike me as peculiar, and which I am forced to put down either to the perversity of human nature or the desire not to give too much comfort for the money.

First: Why is it that the examination of tickets never takes place until nearly the last moment, when one is well wrapped up and settled—the finding of the required piece of cardboard entailing an undoing of the whole arrangement, a search through an infinity of pockets, a loss of temper, a letting in of much cold air, and, to wind up, the almost positive certainty that, having worked oneself into a

fever because the blessed article is not forthcoming, one suddenly remembers that, with a chuckle at one's own 'cuteness and in order not to be disturbed, it had been slipped into the band of one's hat, where it had been staring an idiotic examiner in the face for fully five minutes, he pretending all the while not to have seen it?

Secondly: Why, just as you have recovered from the effects of the official visit and have rearranged yourself with, perhaps, your feet on the opposite cushion, if the door opens and another passenger gets in, should he be certain to choose the very seat where you have deposited your legs, notwithstanding that there may be three or four other vacant places, and that by sitting opposite he inflicts the maximum of discomfort on both?

Thirdly: Why is it that the carriages are built with a projection, whereupon you are supposed to recline your head if disposed to sleep, but to effect which purpose you must perforce sit bolt upright, the said projection

invariably being, for ordinary mortals, some four inches too high?

And why, if either you yourself or your next-door neighbour, neglect to assume the rigid and perpendicular position necessary, but venture to fall asleep in a more comfortable posture, should it be very long odds that you find yourself reposing peacefully on his shirt-front, or vice-versa?

Before I had arrived at any solution of these phenomena, the train ran into Crosby Junction, and, together with a foot-warmer—which, so far as I could make out, was filled with cold water—there entered a portly individual, whose vocation was plainly stamped on his garments—to wit, a horse-dealer.

After the lapse of a few minutes, during which time the portly one kept the door open, he was joined by another member of the fraternity, who, from the likeness between them, was evidently his son. After we had started again, the father began the conversation by saying to his son: "Jim, I wonder how the

old gent likes his horse," at which the youth allowed a smile to steal over his face, and remarked sententiously: "Lucky you got the money down, dad."

Who, I wondered, was the old gent? Somebody else's "Uncle John" perhaps, I thought, and began to reflect on the possibility of his having a nephew to risk his neck over doubtful purchases. I felt a curiosity on the subject, as I knew most of the inhabitants of the country we were approaching, and made up my mind to try and find out.

So turning to the elder I said: "I see, sir" (it is always "Sir" in a first-class, "Mister" in a second, and "Mayster" in a third, I have noticed), "that you know something about horses, and, being a stranger in this country, I should be extremely glad if you could tell me where I am likely to pick up a couple or three at a reasonable price. I have a commission to buy three hunters for a friend in London, and am going down to a place called The Grange, to look at one

belonging to a Mr.—Dawson I think is the name; but I should be glad to hear of two others. By-the-way, do you know what sort of cattle Mr. Dawson keeps?"

As I concluded my speech, which I thought decidedly artful, I saw father and son exchange significant glances, and then my portly friend replied:

"Well, sir, you've come to the right shop for what you want. I have three of the very best you ever clapped your eyes on. If you will favour me with a call to-morrow or the next day we might do business. Though I must tell you that I am a one-price man, and keep none but the best. Perhaps, sir, you would take my card," and he presented for my inspection a highly-glazed piece of pasteboard, whereon was imprinted

JOSIAH BELL & SON,
COMMISSION STABLES,
102, *Bridge Street*,
Muxford.
Hacks, Hunters, Harness.

When he saw that I had digested the contents and had transferred the card to my pocket, he continued in a more confidential tone: "I'll give you a little bit of advice, sir. Don't be too sweet on Mr. Dawson's horse; I know he has one for sale which he bought up in town, a rare good 'un to look at, but a regular beast. If he takes it into his head he will do nothing but stand still and kick, and if he can't shift you at that he'll lie down and roll. Poor old gentleman, he was awful took in over it! He should have come to me. You can't mistake the 'oss, it's a big upstanding bay with a white stocking on the near fore. But here's Muxford, so I'll wish you good-day, and 'opes to see you to-morrow or the next day. If I ain't at home my son here will show you the nags;" and he got down.

Just before the train moved on again, however, he came to the window and said, "Don't you buy the bay 'oss on no account."

It was not hard to put, in this instance, two and two together, and when we arrived at

Slopton I had quite made up my mind where the "new horse" had been bought. On getting out of the train I was nearly deposited under the wheels by a vigorous slap, administered in the centre of my back, coupled with the remark: "Why, my lad, you look like a Polar bear in that ulster. It isn't cold. How are you?"

Having recovered my equilibrium, I turned round and encountered the jovial face of Uncle John, whose nose, however, belied his speech anent the weather, for it was glistening red, like the sun through a London fog.

"I'm all right, uncle," I replied; "I can see you are. How are they all at The Grange?"

"Fit as fiddles," responded my guardian. "Grace is outside in the carriage, so get your traps together and let's be off. By-the-bye, I have such a grand new horse for you to try. You shall ride him on Tuesday, when the hounds meet at Abbot's Hill. A big upstanding bay; such a beauty! Got him dirt cheap; but there, I'll tell you all about him when we get home."

"Has he got a white stocking on the near fore?" I asked.

"Yes; how the deuce did you know, I wonder?" queried my uncle. "But look sharp with those things: you take as long collecting your traps as a fox does to leave a big wood."

"Alas, poor me!" I thought. "It is Mr. Bell's horse;" and I went out to see cousin Grace with anything but a feeling of "pleasures to come." The sight of her dear face and the warmth of her greeting, however, soon made me forget all about the white stocking, and the journey home was passed in questions asked and answers given. She told me that on the morrow the remainder of the party were expected down, among them old Lady Ventnor and her son Lord Ventnor, a young gentleman who gave himself considerable airs on the strength of his title, and for whom I had an intense dislike, owing perhaps in a great measure to an idea that he had designs on Grace's affections, which, although I had

never hinted a word of love to her, caused me more uneasiness than I liked to say.

As a set-off against this (to me) obnoxious element, my old school-fellow and almost brother, Jack Fisher, was already in the house, together with his sister, who was A1 whether across country or in a ball-room, and the life and soul of any house she might be staying in.

Old "young ladies" no doubt used to shake their heads and say, in their jealousy, that she was "so fast;" but a better girl, in every sense of the word, than Lettie Fisher did not exist, despite her boisterous spirits and reckless daring.

Naturally when we arrived at The Grange Jack and I had lots to talk over—old days, old sayings, and old friends; and in the smoking-room, when Uncle John, seated in his favourite armchair, with a long church-warden, fast colouring from constant usage, in his hand, endeavoured to inflict on us a detailed description of the big upstanding

bay, we simply refused to listen to him, and I told him I would prefer to form my judgment from actual experience.

Next day the rest of the guests arrived, and I had the pleasure of seeing young Ventnor doing his little best to ingratiate himself with my cousin. I am afraid that my manner showed that something was wrong, for after dinner in the drawing-room Grace, having for a moment freed herself from his lordship's attentions, came across to where I was sitting moodily contemplating the piano, and said:

"What is the matter, Ned? You look as cross as two sticks. Everyone will think you have commited a murder if you go on staring into vacancy. Ventnor says you would make a beautiful Hamlet."

"Very likely," I retorted. "I was just then thinking with the Prince of Denmark that some of Nature's journeymen had made men, and not made them well, they imitated humanity so abominably. Tell Ventnor I

am highly flattered by his opinion of me as a representative of the Dane."

Grace only raised her eyebrows and left me to my thoughts, which were interrupted by the arrival of the butler, who informed Uncle John that the stud-groom was waiting for orders about the morrow.

My Uncle, who had gone to sleep over his paper and was still in the land of dreams, astonished us all by saying: "No more, thanks; not a drop more. Excellent claret, but no more, thank you."

However, the roar of laughter thoroughly awoke him, and he proceeded to tell us off to our respective mounts. Of course it fell to my lot to ride the "new horse." Ventnor had brought his nags with him. Jack and his sister were to ride The Drake and Topthorn, two of the best hunters in the country, while Grace had her own mare Kitty, Uncle John reserving to himself his favourite animal Corkscrew, so called from his ability to bore through any bullfinch in the world.

Having arranged these matters, candles were lighted and we all retired—the ladies to bed and the men to the land of tobacco and long tumblers.

"Are you nearly ready, Ned? It's a a lovely day," said Jack, as he rushed into my room on the following morning to borrow a razor (Jack had a way of borrowing razors, and a most inconvenient habit of forgetting to return them). "Tell you what it is, if I were you I should take plenty of sticking-plaster in my pocket, and, if you have any, a bandage or two, for James (the footman) has been gratifying me with an account of your mount for to-day. He says no one can ride the beast if it takes it into its head to be obstinate, and that it has nearly reduced one of the helpers to a wafer by going down with him at exercise and rolling over with him."

"Well," I replied, "you are a nice sort of Job's comforter. Here, drop it," as Jack seized my razor. "Do, for goodness' sake, go and get one of Ventnor's."

But he turned a deaf ear, and, making good his retreat, left me to struggle into my boots, and reflect on the pleasures of the chase before me.

When I arrived downstairs I found everyone assembled at breakfast in full hunting fig, and Uncle John sticking up for his new purchase, utterly refusing to believe Jack's history of the brute's manners.

"Ah Ned," said he, as I entered the room, "they are all trying to put me out of conceit with my nag, but you will show them a different story; even if he is a little awkward —which, mind you, boy, I don't believe—he will find his master to-day, eh?"

"Ladies and gentlemen," said the incorrigible Jack, rising, "I venture to propose a toast, with which I am sure you will all agree —ahem! The toast is that of my esteemed friend Mr. Edward Milford, who is about to be created Master of the Rolls."

Shouts of laughter greeted this sally from all except Grace, who remarked: "I think it is

a great shame to chaff my cousin, and if there is any accident you will all be sorry."

I thanked the dear girl by a look, and turned my attention to pigeon-pie, ignoring Ventnor's question as to "Whether I did not feel too nervous to eat?"

Ten o'clock saw us under weigh, and strangely enough the big upstanding bay was on his best behaviour, and walked along by the side of Kitty most sedately — a circumstance which Ventnor, who hoped to monopolise Grace, did not seem particularly thankful for.

Arriving at the meet in good time, I found myself in the midst of a host of old friends, who admired my horse, and said he looked all over like going. The first draw from Abbots Hill was a cover called "The Rough," and it was noted for being a very nasty one to get a start from, as there were only two ways to choose, either through a boggy hunting gateway at the corner, which was always kept closed until the fox was away, or over a rasping

great fence, with a ditch fully ten feet broad on the far side, which was, to say the least of it, not an inviting object to commence with.

Knowing the topography of the land, I slipped down to the gate as the hounds were thrown in, and soon had the satisfaction of seeing a fine old fox steal away and make across the long grass-field on the other side of "The Rough." Giving him a few moments to make good his departure, I holloed, and down came the whole field pounding away for the gate.

Directly my uncle's steed heard them coming he began his tricks by shooting up straight on end. A crack between the ears with my crop, and a gentle reminder of both spurs as he came down fully roused his temper, and, placing himself across the gateway, he started to kick in a way I should never have believed possible. With his head (notwithstanding all I could do) nearly touching the ground, he pirouetted round in a circle, lashing

out viciously the whole time, and rendering it perfectly impossible for anyone to pass.

A few adventurous spirits charged the fence, but the majority of the field were kept back, and seeing that hounds were running hard with a burning scent, blessings (or the reverse) fell fast and thick on my devoted head.

At last, after I had thrashed him till my arm ached, and tried everything I could think of to induce him to shift his ground, the brute played his trump card, and down he went as if he had been shot, rolling over into the ditch, where he lay, and sending me flying well into the middle of the boggiest place, but fortunately clear of himself, so that I escaped without personal injury.

Covered with mud, and my hat squashed flat, I presented a pretty picture as I picked myself up and scrambled out of the way to allow the more fortunate sportsmen a means of egress, which they were not slow to take advantage of.

Grace, riding through, pulled up on the other side, and asked me, with some concern, if I was hurt.

"Not a bit," I said; "go on, I am all right, only take care of yourself."

"Don't get on that brute's back again, dear boy," shouted Uncle John. "It has frightened me out of my life. I thought you were going to be killed."

"Never mind me, Uncle, you will lose the hounds if you wait here; get for'ard and see after Grace; I will get this beast home," I replied; and, beckoning to two labourers who were standing gazing at the prostrate form of the "upstanding" one, I sent for a cart-horse and ropes, and we soon had him out of the ditch and standing, thoroughly subdued, in the field.

The saddletree I found smashed, and the stirrup-iron crumpled up, so there was no use in trying to go on. The horse was not damaged, luckily, with the exception of some hair off; but I had to lead the brute four miles

home, and had had quite enough of it by the time I reached The Grange.

"Good Lord, sir, you are in a mess!" remarked the stud-groom; "I was afraid there would be summat happen. He is a nasty one; why, I rode him myself the other mornin' into the village, and he played me the very identical caper, just before you come to the bridge. He wouldn't pass that there duck-pond by the pub., and when he went down, as near as a toucher put me into the water. The lads do tell me as nothing will make him go by there now. Ah, master should a listened to me, and not go a-buying nags from a pair of copers like them Bells of Muxford."

"Oh," I said, "he came from Bell's, did he? I thought so;" and I recounted my conversation in the train.

When the rest returned of course they had had a capital day, and I (as is usual in these cases) had to stand the brunt of many condolences and much sympathy with my

bad luck. I bore it for some time, but a climax came at dinner. Everybody, Uncle John included, had been vilifying the new purchase, when young Ventnor broke in with affected drawl, saying: "Ah, yes, but a fellah, you know, should not ride such a horse unless he knows how to prevent him rolling. It ain't safe—ah—you know."

Grace flew up in arms in a moment, and, with her eyes flashing with anger, said: "I do not believe, Lord Ventnor, that you or any man could have prevented the horse rolling. My cousin Ned can ride as well as most men, and" (here came the unkindest cut of all) "anyhow I do not think *he* would have turned away from Cleasby brook."

Then, catching my eye, she stopped short, and blushing crimson betrayed her secret, for I knew in that moment that she cared for me, and that I had nothing to fear from fifty Ventnors.

Uncle John, seeing how the land lay, said: "Well, Ventnor, if you are so confident

that my nephew ought to have done better you shall have a chance of showing him how, for you shall ride the horse to-morrow if you like."

Ventnor was about to reply, when Grace gave the signal for the ladies to retire, and as soon as they had gone and we had drawn round the fire, Jack turned to his lordship and spoke up as follows:

"If you ride the bay to-morrow, I'll bet you ten sovereigns he puts you down."

"Oh yes, I'll—ah—ride him, and take your bet, Fisher," replied Ventnor.

"I'll do more than that," said I; "I'll lay you fifty pounds to thirty that you do not ride from this door to the village and back in half an hour; it's under a mile, so you have ample time."

"Ah—done," quoth the young gentleman; and the bets were promptly booked, the time being fixed for the start at 10 A.M.

Next morning everybody, from my Uncle down to the boy who cleaned the knives, turned out to see Lord Ventnor give me

a lesson in riding. Jack, Lettie, and Grace I had let into the secret of the duck-pond, and thither we repaired to see the fun. In a few moments along the road came Ventnor with a sort of I-told-you-how-it-would-be smile on his face.

A snort—a full stop—down went the bay's head, and up went his heels.

"Mind he doesn't roll with you, or it will cost you forty pounds," shouted Jack, and "Look out, man," as the animal's forelegs began to tremble.

Nearer and nearer the pond they got, when all of a sudden down dropped the new horse, Ventnor jumping off as he fell; but unfortunately for himself he caught his near spur in the saddle as the animal turned over, and with an "Oh!" from the two girls, we saw him disappear head first into the pond, while the "white stocking" made tracks homeward as hard as he could go.

"My dear sir," said Jack, as we pulled the dripping lord out of the pond, "a fellah,

you know, should not ride unless he knows how to prevent a horse rolling; it isn't safe, you know."

This was too much for both Grace and Lettie, and they were forced to retire in order to hide their laughter. Ventnor was so angry that he would not speak, and he paid us our money with a very bad grace the same evening. However, it taught him a lesson that it will take him years to forget.

I told Uncle John after this of my meeting in the train with the Messrs. Bell, and he decided at once to send the brute up to Aldridge's, where the fine upstanding bay fetched exactly twenty-five guineas, and was dear at that.

On Christmas Eve I ventured to ask Grace for a Christmas present, to wit, herself, and as Jack, who was my best man, said at the wedding breakfast: "Though the mount was not a pleasant one, still as it was instrumental in obtaining for me my wife, I had no right to be too hard on Uncle John's New Horse."

THE HOG-BACKED STILE.

CHAPTER I.

COMING EVENTS.

Towards the middle of December, 1878, a dog-cart might have been seen standing outside the small station of Newcome, in Slopshire. There was nothing particularly remarkable about the turn-out—a goodish-looking animal in the shafts and a certain air of neatness stamped it as belonging to a gentleman, but beyond that there was no particular feature to attract attention. No gaudy red wheels, nothing dazzling in the way of "picking out;" simply an ordinary

dog-cart, which had come down from Belton Hall to meet the 5.35 train from London.

Belton Hall, an old Elizabethan mansion, belonged to the Vivians, was inhabited by Colonel George Vivian and his daughter Mildred, and they were expecting two visitors, who had been asked to the Hall for Christmas and hunting—one, Jack Vivian, the Colonel's nephew; the other, a Mr. Thomas Simpson, who was known to the world in general to be following that calling which covers a multitude of sins, which means so much yet expresses so little, viz. "something in the City."

Colonel Vivian was as keen a sportsman and as good a man to hounds as there was in Slopshire, and his daughter followed closely in his footsteps—too closely sometimes, for on one occasion, when the Colonel came down at a stiffish stake-and-bound fence, Mildred, unable to stop in time, jumped right on the top of him, her horse's near hind-foot going slap through the crown of his new hat, which

luckily did not at the moment contain her father's head.

Belton was therefore a certain find, and the Master, knowing this, always had a fixture there in the Christmas week.

Both Mildred and her father were too apt to gauge a man by his powers of getting over a country, and woe betide any unfortunate individual who had been seen to exhibit any —well, I will say hesitation—when hounds were running. If he happened to be staying at the Hall, he was chaffed most unmercifully, and under any other circumstances he was immediately set down in the mental tablets of the Vivians as a man who was not worth knowing.

There was but little fear of Jack not coming up to the mark in the way of riding, for, born and brought up in the country, his first recollections were associated with hounds, and his earliest lessons comprised "the run of a fox." Of late years he had not been able to hunt as much as he would have liked,

for there were two fatal objections in his way—want of time and want of money.

Jack Vivian was a barrister, and a hard-working one withal. He had got his foot on the second rung of the ladder of success and meant going upwards; therefore he had little time for play, and but a small balance of spare cash; so it was only now and again that he could snatch a brief holiday, and, finding neck and spurs against a friend's horse, engage in his favourite pursuit. Notwithstanding this, there were few men who would care to back themselves against Jack across country, and there was probably not one (old Jim the Huntsman excepted) who knew more about a fox or what hounds were doing.

Mr. Simpson, on the other hand, was rolling in wealth, and as his "something in the City" did not occupy much of his time, he tried in every way to assume the appearance of a country gentleman, and to be considered a modern Nimrod.

Somehow, though, his three hundred-guinea hunters did not carry Mr. Simpson to the end, and it was marvellous the extraordinary and unforeseen obstacles that had prevented his appearance at the death.

Rivers suddenly had sprung up where none had been known before, and six-foot posts and rails, with broad double ditches, had caused Mr. Simpson alone to tarry on his course. In other words he was an arrant "funk," though of course he would not have acknowledged the soft impeachment.

It was, as you may think, very odd that such a man should be the guest of so ardent a sportsman as the owner of Belton, but it happened thus. The previous year the Colonel and his daughter were staying in Leicestershire, and at a friend's house they met Mr. Simpson. So taken up with admiring his horses was the Colonel that he either omitted to look at the owner, or else invested him with a halo which was the overflow of the equine worship.

Besides, open house, hunters five days a week for himself and daughter, and a large establishment, were not to be maintained for nothing; and the Colonel, in the matter of £ s. d., was a remarkably practical man, and had no objection to the possibility of a rich son-in-law, even though he might be "in the City."

Therefore, for Christmas week, Simpson and his horses were offered bed and board at Belton; and already, in his own mind, had Mr. S. drawn up a deed of partnership, with Miss Vivian as the Co., for he had been completely knocked out of time at the first sight of Mildred, and had fallen head over ears in—what he was pleased to call—love. What his chances of success were may be gathered from the following conversation, which took place in the drawing-room after the dog-cart had gone down to the station.

Mildred—it was a non-hunting day—was seated in a low easy-chair, occupied with five-o'clock tea, and by her side, on a cushion,

reclined her cousin Ethel, a young girl of sixteen, while opposite was the Rev. Mr. Wilton, the clergyman of the place—one of the old school of sporting parsons, who was good for a fast twenty minutes either in the field or the pulpit; and though he had, for fifty odd years, hunted regularly four days a-week, there was not a man, woman, or child in the parish whose every trouble was not known to him, and there was not one of them who would not willingly have given up everything to help their idol, "t' owd parson."

With his back to the fire stood the Colonel, engaged in conversation with Florence Wingfield, sister to the expected Jack. She was staying in the house with her husband, Captain Tom Wingfield, of the 23rd Hussars, who at this moment was trying a new purchase by riding over to the kennels, some ten miles away.

"Which room has Mr. Simpson got, Milly?" said the Colonel suddenly.

"The best bachelor's room, papa," replied the young lady; "I put him there because I thought the gorgeous pattern of the new carpet you chose would suit his taste, and I have hung up some of those old sporting prints for him to take a lesson from.

"And what room has Jack got?" continued the Colonel, not best pleased at the impression his intended guest had produced on his daughter.

"Oh, dear old Jack has, of course, his own room. Florence arranged it just as it used to be, and before tea came I saw the fire was all right."

"I suppose you did not happen to see if Mr. Simpson's fire was all right, Mildred?" said Mr. Wilton, with a sly twinkle in his eye.

"No; Ethel did that," she replied, laughing; "besides, with that red face he can't be cold."

"Milly, never judge by appearances,"

interrupted Mrs. Wingfield, who saw by her uncle's face that the conversation was not particularly agreeable to him. Woman-like, she had read him like a book; and, though willing to keep the peace, she had long ago made up her mind that Mildred was to be her brother's wife or an old maid—*aut Cæsar aut nihil*; and having settled this, she set herself down to carry out her plans.

"Who is talking about judging by appearances?" put in a manly voice, as Tom Wingfield, somewhat muddy of coat, walked into the room.

"I was," said his wife. "I was telling Milly not to judge by appearances, for I thought you a nice fellow once, and—ahem!—I was taken in by your appearance."

"All right, Mrs. Impudence," retorted Tom; "no hunting for you. I thought I had two beautiful ladies' hunters, but I was deceived by appearances. Anyhow, let me have a cup of tea. I have given my new nag a lesson he won't forget. He refused

that fence out of the road by the windmill, and put me down twice; then tried to bolt for Paradise Hill, but after a fight we got on terms, and he goes like an angel now."

"I must make a note of that, Wingfield," interrupted Mr. Wilton. "It is a curious coincidence of an animal being stopped on its way to Paradise, yet suddenly becoming an angel."

"Capital text for next Sunday, Wilton," said the Colonel. "But hark! I hear the dog-cart, and here they come round the corner of the drive."

"Oh Lord!" ejaculates Tom; "can anyone tell me how gray shirtings are? Must talk to a man who is in the City about shirtings or backwardations, you know. I'll ask Jack what he gave for his flannel shirts."

Amid the shouts of laughter which followed this sally the door opened, and the butler announced: "Mr. Simpson and Master Jack."

CHAPTER II.

OF THE CITY CIVIC.

"DELIGHTED to see you, Mr. Simpson," said the Colonel, taking that gentleman's somewhat flabby hand, and introducing him to the others in turn. "Ah Jack, my boy, how are you? I have such a horse for you; but no spurs allowed, mind."

"All right, uncle," replied Jack, coming to the fire; "I'll remember. But how are you all? Florence, you are getting most abominably fat. Why, Milly, ain't you going to say How do you do to me?—not that way," as Mildred put out her hand. "I ask you, is that the way to welcome your long-lost cousin? Come to my arms"—a proceeding that he promptly tried to put into force, and had he not stumbled head over heels over Ethel, who from her position on the

ground he had not noticed, would have succeeded in his endeavour.

As it was, like a drowning man, he clutched at the first thing that came to hand, which, happening to be Simpson's coat-tail, brought that worthy gentleman down with him, and cut short the polite little speech he was about to address to Mildred.

It was rather hard lines on the unfortunate individual, for all the way down in the train he had been (when Jack's eye was not upon him) rehearsing it, and now it was lost for ever.

"I beg your ten thousand pardons, Simpson," said Jack, struggling to his feet. "Why, it's Ethel. What on earth do you go and curl yourself up like a fox-terrier on the hearthrug for, and make people do these pantomime tricks over you? You nearly were the death of two of Her Majesty's most esteemed subjects."

"Heavy fall in shirtings," whispered the

irrepressible Tom to Mildred, who was obliged to go out of the room, ostensibly to see the housekeeper, but in reality to hide her laughter.

"Not hurt, I hope?" asked the Colonel.

"No—ah—Colonel Vivian, I thank you; but I must apologise to Miss Vivian. It must have astonished her. Ah, she is gone," said Simpson, who was, if possible, of a more rosy hue than ever.

"Oh, Mildred's all right," put in Jack; "it's not the first time she has seen a man down by many a hundred, nor will it be the last if hounds run to-morrow. Which is my room, uncle? I'll show Simpson his too. It's nearly time to dress."

"You are in your old quarters, Jack, and Mr. Simpson is in the bachelor's room, which, I hope, he will find comfortable," said his uncle.

"Come on then, Simpson; I'll take you to your diggings, and then I'll go and see Phillips the stud-groom, and tell him to

show your man where to put himself and his horses too," continued Jack, and out they went.

"What a ridiculous *contretemps!*" said Florence as the door closed. "I never saw anything half so funny as Mr. Simpson's face. My dear Ethel, I thought I should have died."

"I thought I should have been smothered," replied Ethel. "I shall never be able to look Mr. Simpson in the face again."

Mr. Wilton, who had hitherto been a silent spectator, here interrupted with "I am afraid the gentleman is not in the same happy state as Wingfield's horse, for I distinctly heard him as he fell utter a most unangelic word beginning with a D."

"A falling angel can't be particular," said Tom. "What do you say, Colonel?"

"I say that it's very wrong of you to make fun of our guest, and that if you don't go to dress at once you will be all late for dinner;" with which the master of the house walked out of the room followed by the rest.

At seven o'clock the whole party were reassembled in the drawing-room. Mr. Simpson, in all the consciousness of a spotless shirt in which blazed an elaborate diamond stud the size of a sixpenny piece, was trying to make himself agreeable to Mildred, while Jack was in a deep discussion with Tom and his uncle over the prospects of the season, and listening to the accounts of past performances. "Dinner is served" from the butler took them all into the dining-room, where they were soon hard at what Tom called "trencher-work."

"What horses have you brought, Mr. Simpson?" said the Colonel during the pause after the soup.

"Ah—two, Colonel Vivian. A bay mare I had last season, and a new horse I bought from Ward the other day; a splendid fencer —nothing is too big for him. Ah—I had to give four hundred for him though, so he ought to be good," replied Simpson.

"He ought indeed. I wish I could afford

to give such prices," rejoined the Colonel, on whose ear the statement of £ s. d. grated somewhat harshly. "I advise you to ride him to-morrow; the hounds meet here, and the keeper tells me there are a brace of foxes in the osiers, and if they take the usual line it wants a good horse to live with them."

Mr. Simpson's face did not express a vast amount of rapture at this, and he almost wished he had not been quite so fulsome on the subject of his new purchase. However, turning to Mildred, he said: "Miss Vivian —ah—I suppose you follow the hounds to-morrow?"

"Yes," replies Mildred; "I ride my favourite horse Birdcatcher, and I hope we shall show you some sport."

"Follow the hounds!" muttered Jack under his breath, who was getting rather jealous of his fellow-traveller. "He did not suppose the hounds would follow her, did he?" an idea that he imparted to Ethel, who was next to him, and which seemed to amuse her

mightily. "I believe the fellow's a funk," he went on. "Anyhow, I'll draw him," and across the table he said: "Simpson, is your nag good at water and timber, for the Belton brook runs below the osiers, and there are one or two rather awkward stiles to be negotiated?"

"Oh yes. Ah—he is a first-rate water-jumper, and, I believe, very good all round."

"That's all right . then; you will be cutting us all down," put in Tom; whereat Simpson smiled a sickly and most unbecoming smile, by which he meant to insinuate that he was going to try, and thought it extremely probable that he would succeed, but which conveyed to everybody the impression that he wished Belton brook and the stiles at the bottom of the sea.

Florence, who saw this, immediately proceeded to set his mind at rest by telling a number of stories anent the difficulties of the country, and the number of men that had come out in the morning in all the pride of

their scarlet, and had returned bemudded and besmirched after a visit to the bottom of the brook, all of which anecdotes she referred to Mr. Wilton for verification.

After dinner Mr. Simpson made the running very strongly with Mildred, much to Jack's disgust; and as he found that, do what he would, he was unable to get a word in edgeways without having his eyes nearly put out by the glitter of the City gentleman's diamond stud, he took refuge behind the paper, which position, notwithstanding Mildred's glance of entreaty, he maintained resolutely till the appearance of candles and the Colonel's orders for the morning warned everybody that it was bedtime.

"Good-night, Jack, my boy," said his uncle, after the ladies had retired. "I shan't come to the smoking-room to-night. Mind, breakfast at nine sharp. I have ordered a real flyer for you to-morrow, and I want you to keep up your reputation and show them the way, also to give an eye to Milly. I

can trust her with most horses, but Bird-catcher is, as you know, an awkward customer if he gets his temper up. Mr. Simpson," turning to his guest, "you will find everything in the smoking-room. Jack and Tom will show you where it is. I am rather tired, and will wish you good-night and good sport to-morrow."

"Tom," said Jack to his brother-in-law, "you take Simpson to the den. I'm off to bed; you will excuse my not coming. I've a bad headache, and I want to look over a case I have in hand which is rather important. Good-night, old man; good-night, Simpson;" and with that he retired, muttering to himself: "How the deuce Uncle George could have invited such a cad down here I can't think."

On arriving in his room he found his sister waiting for him, and she immediately commenced: "Dear old Jack, I knew you would not smoke to-night, for I saw you were put out. You need not be afraid about Milly and Mr. Simpson; she detests him. If Uncle

George thinks she will ever marry a man like that he is mistaken."

"What's the odds, Florence," said Jack in a desponding tone; "it is no use denying the fact that I am awfully fond of Milly, but what chance have I, as poor as a church mouse, against a man rolling in wealth? And even if she doesn't marry Simpson, some other rich son of a gun will be after her, and it will break my heart to see her married. By-the-way, how can uncle ever tolerate such a vulgarian as Simpson?"

"'Money makes the mare to go,'" replied his sister; "and I fancy Uncle George has been spending a little too much lately. But cheer up, Jack dear; perhaps our old Indian will die, and leave you a heap of money. Meanwhile, rely on me to keep off all intruders: 'Trespassers will be prosecuted,' and all that sort of thing; spring-guns and the extreme penalty of the law, you know."

"Florence, you are a darling," said Jack, kissing her; "but you can't kill the Nabob,

and even a woman's wit can't keep Milly under lock and key till your pauper brother makes enough money to enable him to see papa in the study without feeling that he may be shown out of the door by the butler."

"*Si c'est possible c'est fait, si c'est impossible cela ce fera,*" laughed Florence, as she left her brother to think over what she had said.

The old Indian, Sandford by name, was the great hope of both Jack and his sister. He was their mother's only brother, and though he had been home but once in forty years, an event which occurred some nine years back, he had on that occasion intimated that Jack was to be his heir, and when driven to India by what he called "the cursed climate and infernal fogs" of his native country, he had left a thousand pounds to be used for Jack's advancement in life, and regularly every Christmas a letter arrived from Simla to Jack, enclosing an order on Messrs. Drummond for two hnndred pounds, bearing the simple signature "John Sandford."

When his sister had gone Jack threw himself into a chair, and after musing for some time tumbled into bed, and was soon dreaming of Milly, the Nabob, and Simpson, all of whom were trying to catch an animal that occasionally took the shape of Birdcatcher, and as often that of his sister.

CHAPTER III.

FLOOD AND FIELD.

"A SOUTHERLY wind and a cloudy sky," sung loudly by his bedside, woke Jack on the following morning, and, opening his eyes, he encountered those of Tom Wingfield, who, as soon as he saw that he had effected his purpose—to wit, waking Jack—said: "How's the head, old man? It's a ripping fine morning; tumble up. Here's the shaving-water," as the footman entered the room. "I've called Simpson. By Jove, what a bore

that man is! he told me last night exactly how much he had given for everything he possessed. However, Phillips, whom I saw just now, says his four hundred guineas worth looks a nailer, but I doubt if our friend's heart is in the right place."

"Heart be blowed!" growled Jack; "the only heart he knows of is the heart of the City. Clear out, Tom, though; it's late, and I shall never be dressed in time for breakfast."

However, he was, and as he entered the dining-room he thought he had never seen Milly look so well as, in her well-fitting and workmanlike habit, she dispensed the honours of the tea.

Simpson was simply gorgeous, and evidently fancied himself considerably, though as the clock marked the hour of ten and the first contingent arrived, his rubicund features went many degrees paler at the thought of Belton brook and his four-hundred-guinea hunter.

Punctual to the minute the hounds arrived,

and after a quarter of an hour, during which time refreshment for man and horse was in full swing, the signal to move off was given.

"Mornin', Master Jack," said old Jim the Huntsman, as Jack came out of the stable-yard, his mount bucking like an Australian. "I'm main glad to see you wi' us again; we shall soon find summat to take the play out o' you" (alluding to the horse). "If I mistake not, you mean a-showing 'em what for, and I'm sure I hope you will."

"Jim, you get younger every day. They tell me you are going to be married again and give up hunting; is it true?" was Jack's reply.

"Get along with you; you're no better than you used to be, Master Jack," retorted the old man, who was fast nearing his seventieth year.

At this moment the Colonel rode up, accompanied by Mildred and Mr. Simpson, the latter, it must be confessed, looking far from comfortable. "Jim," said he, "we will draw

the osiers first, please, up-wind, and send Williams" (the First Whip) "down to the corner. Mr. Wilton and myself will stop by the gate and view him if he tries back. Mr. Talbot" (the Master) "has gone on to the wood, and wished me to tell you."

"Right, Colonel," replied the Huntsman, lifting his cap; and with a "Coop, coome away!" he trotted off down to the bottom end, the hounds clustering all round his horse.

"This way, Milly," said Jack. "Come on, Simpson and Tom," and the quartet established themselves out of sight at the top end of the osier-bed. Presently old Jim was heard cheering his hounds, and a whimper from old Solomon proclaimed the fox to be at home, as usual.

"Eugh, at him!" cheered Jim, and as the whimper swelled into a chorus a regular traveller slipped out close to Mr. Simpson, and headed straight over the dreaded brook.

"By gad, he's off!" said Jack, and "Gorne awa-a-y!" proclaimed his departure to the

expectant field. The hounds tumbled out of covert all of a heap, and plunging into the brook in a body were away on the other side in a trice, with a scent breast high.

"Miss Vivian, for goodness' sake don't attempt the brook," implored Simpson; "I will stop and look after you."

But Mildred, vouchsafing him not so much as a look, caught the impatient Birdcatcher by the head, and with Jack and Tom on either side the trio rattled down at the water, which was negotiated with safety.

"Bravo!" said Jack; "here comes Simpson;" and come he did, for his perfect hunter was not made of the stuff to be left behind if he could help it, and seeing his three companions careering away down the opposite field, he, to use a nautical expression, "took charge," and, before his rider knew what had happened, had landed him safely on the other side of the obstacle.

"Down the lane," said Jack to Mildred as they popped over the fence that led out of the

meadow; "it's straight for Boltby big wood. Here you are, Jim," as the Huntsman came up to where the hounds had checked for a moment in the lane; "they made it good as far as this. Hark for'ard! Minstrel has it;" and away they went a cracker, turning sharp to the right into some rolling grass-fields.

By this time Mr. Simpson was beginning to pluck up his courage, and in company with those who had not been so favoured at the start was going fairly well. Ten minutes more brought them to the stiles that had been the subject of discussion at dinner the previous evening, and nasty-looking objects they were. The first was not so bad, but the second was a regular teaser—hog-backed, with a yawning ditch, spanned by a footboard on the far side.

"Steady, Milly," said Tom, as Birdcatcher rushed at No. 1.

"By gad, she'll be down if she goes at that pace," shouted Jack in an agony, his horse, a young 'un, having refused.

At this crisis Mr. Simpson appeared on the scene, the rest of the field preferring the safer course down the lane. Tom managed the hog-back successfully, and was too much occupied with the hounds, now racing a field ahead, to think of Mildred, who had evidently got as much as she could manage in the thoroughly-roused Birdcatcher.

Jack's feelings can be better imagined than described as he saw Milly rush at the stile and Birdcatcher turn a complete somersault, sending his mistress flying, happily, some yards away from where he fell.

"Comé up, you brute," he yelled, driving his spurs home and fairly lifting the astonished young 'un over both fences. Scarcely had he landed over the hog-back than he was off his horse and kneeling by Milly in a paroxysm of grief.

"My darling child, are you hurt? My God, she's dead!" he cried, as he tried to lift her.

But she was only stunned for the moment,

and to his ineffable joy Milly opened her eyes and said: "It's all right, Jack; I'm not hurt. Catch my horse and let's get on."

The "Thank God" came from the bottom of his heart as he caught the two nags and lifted her on; but the agonised expression on his face told Mildred plainer than any words the "old old tale," and in her inmost heart she blessed the fall for the revelation.

The fox meanwhile, who had been headed by a labourer, turned short back, and as they came round, about two fields above the spot where the accident tŏok place, everyone was much amused at the sight of Mr. Simpson, who, unable to muster up courage to ride at the place, and thinking that no one was likely to see him, had got off his horse, and having promised a yokel a sovereign to catch him on the other side, was doing his best, with the aid of his hunting-whip, to induce his four hundred guineas' worth to take it by himself. No further mishap occurred, and in half an hour, after running hard all the time, they

viewed and killed their fox in the open, Mr. Simpson arriving just as the last morsel disappeared down old Solomon's throat.

By this time Mildred was feeling the effects of her fall, and Simpson was only too glad to offer to be her escort home ; an opportunity which he took advantage of to propose in due form, the effect of his solicitations being somewhat marred by the aversion his horse displayed to walking.

"I'm very sorry, Mr. Simpson," said Mildred, in reply to his entreaties that she would consent to be the "Co.," "I'm very sorry, but it can never be."

"There's some other fellow in the case ; I *will* know who. It's that horrid cousin of yours," said the man of money with his innate vulgarity, for he could not understand any girl refusing his gold.

"Mr. Simpson, you have no right to speak to me like that ; and seeing that my cousin picked me up when I fell, while you were too much alarmed for your own safety, *I* have no

reason to consider him horrid," was Mildred's cutting reply, after which she refused to speak till they arrived at the Hall.

Whether it was the rebuff that he had received, or joy at finding himself safe, I cannot say, but at dinner Simpson drank more than was his custom, and was proportionately talkative and bombastic in consequence, and towards the end he entertained the company with a description of how he got over the most enormous places.

"You—ah—see, my horse" (he called it "'orse" now that the wine was in) "refused that stile where Miss Vivian fell, and Mr. Ward told me it was no use riding him at the same thing twice, so I had to look out—ah—for another place. I saw there was nothing for it but the fence at the side" (it was an overgrown blackthorn, with a six-feet post and rails run through the middle), "and—ah—by Jove! my horse cleared it without touching a twig —ah."

"My word, Simpson, that was a jump—

almost as big as the cow took when it vaulted over the moon," said Tom.

"Fact, sir, 'shure you," replied he of the City, when the butler came up behind his chair and in an audible voice said: "I beg pardon, sir, but there's a man downstairs who says you told him to call—says you promised him a sovereign for catching your horse when you turned it over the stile."

It may have been rude, but the guilty look of Simpson and the utter ludicrousness of the whole affair was too much, and everybody, including the Colonel, fairly shrieked with laughter, during which Mr. Simpson bowed himself out to see about this "tale of the sovereign," as he called it.

Later on the butler appeared a second time, bearing in his hand a yellow envelope, which he handed to Jack.

Opening it carelessly he read: "As agents to John Sandford, acquaint you of his death. Yourself left sole heir. Telegraph instructions. Money and securities, eighty thousand. Three

large tea estates, besides other property. Letter follows.—Kirkman and Co., Calcutta."

I am afraid Jack's face did not express great sorrow for his deceased uncle. Indeed, as he glanced across at Milly, a great look of joy came into his eyes, and after dinner he found an opportunity to ask her a question, receiving a very different answer to that vouchsafed to Mr. Simpson.

Christmas morning he interviewed "papa in the study" without fear of the butler, and that evening the Colonel, with tears in his eyes, made a long speech, wherein he gave his daughter to his favourite nephew, with solemn injunctions to take care of her.

Jack, in returning thanks, said he would do his best to see that she did not break her neck; he had already had a turn he should never forget; but as it was somewhat instrumental in helping him to gain Milly, he begged to propose the health of The Hog-backed Stile.

Simpson, when he saw the game was lost,

turned out a much better fellow than anyone gave him credit for, and Milly found on her table a pearl necklace and a card, on which was written : "With T. Simpson's best wishes and apologies for rudeness."

Now, whenever he meets Jack and his wife, he tells them that the lesson he got at Belton taught him that money and bluster were not everything in this merry world of ours.

THE END.

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